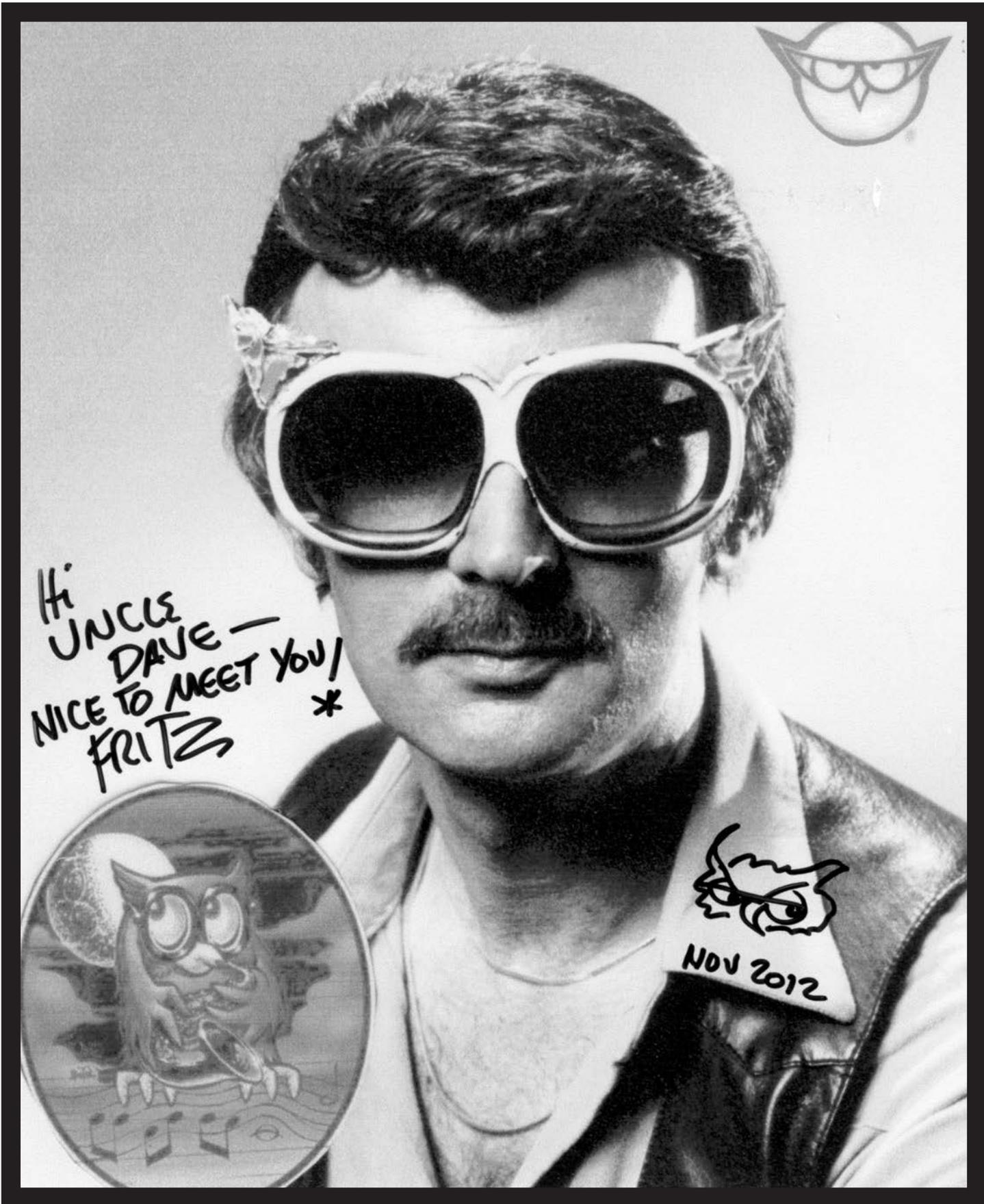




A r t i f a c t s



**Cover:** See pages two and three. Krohnographs story, page 4; Gene Johnson p. 5; Trib legacy by Phil Brown, 6; T.B. Scott by Lori Brost, 7; Jessie Sanford by Marilyn Slusarski, 8-9; Museum history, 10-13; Krohnographs, 14-19; Castillians by Kurt Halverson, 20-21; Garage House by Diane Maerz Podawiltz, 22-25; Roberson Players, 26-27; Johnson Hill by Earle Garber, 28-29; Samuel Stevens by David Laspa, 30; James Alban by Billy Parker, 31.

## Nite Owl Revisits Nekoosa



Not only does he sport a prodigious Dutch moniker, Frederick C. Peerenboom is one of the few natives of River City to attain pop culture celebrity. Widely known in media circles radiating from Columbus, Ohio, Peerenboom is “Fritz the Nite Owl,” characterized by a sonorous radio voice and awe-inspiring spectacles.

“Nite Owl Theatre,” presenting movies with commentary, was produced at Channel 10, Columbus, seven nights a week from 1974-1991, during which time Fritz earned five regional Emmy awards. He also held nite court at numerous radio stations and composed a jazz music column.

Dubbed “Fritz” as long as he can remember, the future Nite Owl was born at Wisconsin Rapids’ Riverview hospital in 1934 to Nekoosa mill chemist Maurice “Perry” and Rosalie Peerenboom. Fritz enjoyed his tender years at 121 W. 5th Ave., Nekoosa (which he pronounces “Nee-koo-sah”).

One of many cherished memories is of skiing down a hill near his house onto the frozen Wisconsin river. Later, with pals such as Nancy Hostetter, Jack Frisch and Carl Arendt, skating all the way across. “Thrill of thrills” was to hear a familiar yellow Piper Cub airplane coming in and rushing down to see it land on the river ice, soon to fly off toward some unknown next stop.

To the west of the house on 5th lay the immense paper mill log piles that seemed to stretch from Nekoosa to Port Edwards and beyond. “We used to play in, on and between them, and borrow logs to build tree houses,” he said. “The kids in Nekoosa had the best log rafts in the world.”

A favorite hangout was the Rexall drug store, where owner Sid Denis allowed young customers to enjoy a syrupy hand-blended Coke in a booth while perusing, at no charge, comic books from the best-ever magazine rack. All Denis asked was that the comics be put back neatly.

Also at the drug store, Fritz and his older brother picked up *Daily Tribunes* to deliver. In those days, you collected payment in person and met all the customers on your route.

Next to the drug store was the post office, where Fritz and family visited every day, hoping for a V-Mail from “Pops.” “Your dad would write a letter in the Pacific and somehow they would photograph it and reduce it to a smaller size.”

As a member of the Captain Marvel Club, Fritz received letters telling him what a wonderful guy he was and that he should buy war bonds.

Also in downtown Nekoosa were the Herrick hotel and two grocery stores: Krenke’s, where Mother called in the order and Krenke bagged it up; and Korbel’s, more of a combination supermarket.

Resplendent in purple and white uniforms with gold buttons, Fritz played sax in the Nekoosa city band for Sunday concerts in the bandshell and parades down Market Street. While attending Sacred Heart Catholic school, he assisted as an altar boy for Father Daul in Sacred Heart church.

The developing Nite Owl’s facility for broadcast began when his voice changed in sixth grade and he began to mimic narrators on popular radio programs: Sam Spade, Buck Rogers, Terry and the Pirates and Captain Marvel.

About that time, Fritz’s father got a job in Maryland and the family moved there—and on to Columbus, Ohio, where Fritz graduated from Ohio State University.

Fritz said he couldn’t have asked for a nicer childhood. The only bad vibe was that World War II was going on. “The last thing you wanted to get was a telegram or a long distance phone call because that meant your father was dead, your brother was dead, your husband or boyfriend was dead.”

He hopes to return one more time, said Fritz: just to hang out, go down by the river, go by the church. “On winter days I’d be serving at the early mass. On an early morning, there’s no cars on the road, the sun ain’t up, the moon is out and the trees are encased in ice, like crystal. I cut through Nancy Hostetter’s yard, tromp through an alley, through Milkey’s and across to the church and school; crunching through six or seven inches of snow—fantastic.”

Previously published in “River City Memoirs,” *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*

Find the Nite Owl at [www.fritzlives.com](http://www.fritzlives.com).



GREGORY PECK / DOLLY PARTON



↑ STEVE LAWRENCE & BRIAN DENNEHY



Uncle Dave

## Krohnographs Appreciated

Sorting old files at the *Daily Tribune*, I said the wrong thing to general manager and editor Allen Hicks—that, if fellow contributor Don Krohn were to die, I would be the most ancient *Daily Tribune* contributor. My tenure was more continuous than Krohn's, 1980-present, but his began in 1948, when I was three years old.

On Nov. 12, 2012, a week or so after my unfortunate commentary, came the news of Krohn's death, following his latest tree farm column in the *Tribune*. He had also published a story in the August 2012 *Artifacts*, giving an account of Jere Witter flying under the Grand Avenue Bridge.

In a 2001 interview, later part of the May 2008 *Artifacts*, Krohn said he had begun his journalism career during senior year at Lincoln high school by working in the *Daily Tribune* mail room.

Krohn soon learned to develop film and print photos in the old *Tribune* darkroom, leading to on-the-job training as a part-time weekend photographer. Soon, he was asked by publisher and owner William F. Huffman Sr. to come in full-time for \$25 a week.

Krohn was the photographer for the 1951 LHS champion basketball team and chronicler of events surrounding the visions of "Our Lady of Necedah."

In 1953, he was named assistant editor and photographer of the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. magazine *Nepco News*. That year, he married Inez Ruesch and moved to Port Edwards, a village he was to be closely associated with. Krohn became public relations manager in 1971 and worked for NEPCO and its successors for 37 years.

Representing Great Northern Nekoosa Corp. in the early 1980s, Krohn supported the efforts of Wakely Inn Preservation, Inc., whose building and grounds were owned by the paper company. He famously loaned me the house key for a night of ghost busting and, in 1984, maneuvered a gift of Nekoosa paper for *River City Memoirs II*.

Krohn, who retired in 1990, became a frequent visitor to the Museum and a supporter of its efforts. He had the foresight to save his *Tribune* photos and many years later to donate them to the Museum. As "Krohnographs," they are on display in exhibits, on the SWCHC website and frequently in "Artifacts."

Previously published in "River City Memoirs," Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune



People and places: thanks to Don Krohn for images of our youth and our landmarks, such as Montgomery Ward on West Grand Avenue.

## Gene's Memoirs

Gerald E. "Gene" Johnson, whose memoirs provided invaluable vignettes of our town in its prime, died Nov. 24, 2012, in California.

Like Don Krohn, Johnson was a modest gentleman, an exemplary citizen, a long time paper company employee and a practicing historian.

Johnson graduated from Lincoln High School in 1946 and Krohn in 1947. Both were 84 at the time of their deaths.

Like Krohn, Johnson had become a familiar presence at the Museum and a regular contributor to *Artifacts*. Earlier this year, he asked me to come to his house and look at items he wanted to donate; Gene had a health problem and his time was about up.

The son of John S. and Tena (Vanderploeg) Johnson, he married Irene Bautz July 28, 1951, in Wisconsin Rapids and worked 43 years at the Biron Division of the Consolidated paper company. Like Krohn, he retired in 1990.

A founding member of the Numismatists (currency collectors) of Wisconsin, Johnson also edited their quarterly news magazine. In 1967, he published *Trade Tokens of Wisconsin*, which provided the background for some of his *Artifacts* stories.

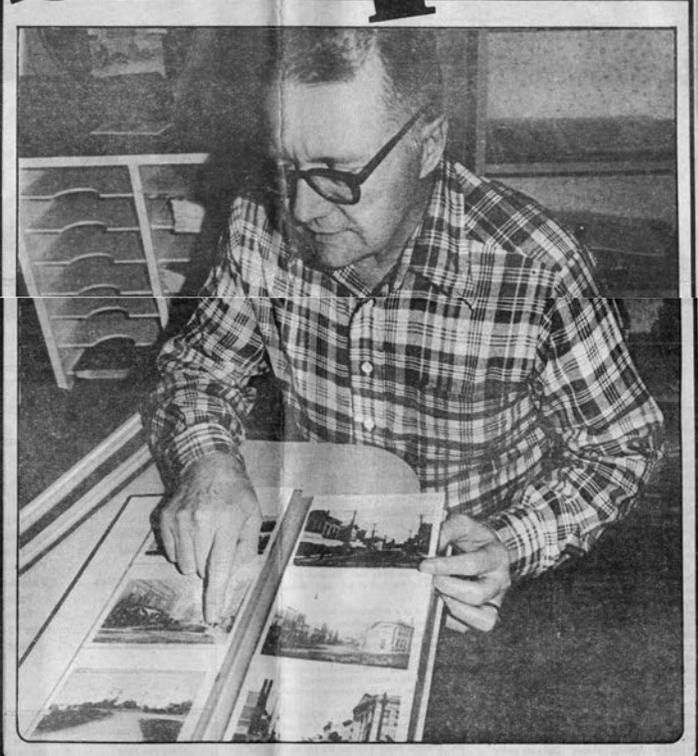
Johnson served on the Wisconsin Rapids District School Board 1967-71, during the planning and building of West Junior High School and on the board of directors of Camp Five Museum, Laona, Wis., 1977-88.

His books, collections and memoirs, like Krohn's photographs, will continue to illuminate our shared past.

Central Wisconsin

# SCOPE

January 8, 1981



**Collecting postcards**

Gerald Johnson only has been collecting postcards for six years, but estimates he has 13,000. He primarily is interested in collecting old cards from Wood County. He has several hundred of Grand Rapids, but says it's "the tip of an iceberg." There probably were thousands of different cards published in Wisconsin Rapids during 1900 and 1920. (See story on page 2)

Scope photos by  
Dave Engel, 1981

### Collector

Joan Haasl displays postcards she has accumulated since 1948, when her aunt died and left two cards behind, which started Mrs. Haasl's collection.



Same 1981 issue: Joan Haasl, (1928-2010) former SWCHC board member and *Artifacts* contributor

Phil Brown

SWCHC President

## Preserving A Legacy

In December 2012, Incurage Community Foundation purchased the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* building at 220 First Ave. S. After 52 years, this structure was much more spacious than needed for publishing our local paper.

Its proud history can be traced to May 20, 1960, when publisher and owner William F. Huffman, Jr. announced, “On Saturday and Sunday it will be the pleasure of all of us at the *Wisconsin Rapids Tribune* and Radio Station WFHR to welcome the public at an Open House in the new building on 1st Ave. So.”

In a special supplement distributed during the open house, the *Daily Tribune* traced the roots of journalism here to Nov. 28, 1857, when J.N. Brundage published the first issue of the *Wood County Reporter*. That was only one year after Wood County was organized.

Since then, many other newspapers have come and gone from our community. *Daily Tribune* history began in 1919, when William F. Huffman, Sr., of Rockford, Ill., purchased the *Wisconsin Valley Leader*, followed by the *Grand Rapids Tribune* and *Nekoosa Tribune*.

By 1923, Huffman had discontinued the other papers and the *Daily Tribune* has delivered the news to the citizens of South Wood County ever since.

The Trib’s media partner, William F. Huffman Radio (WFHR), came on the air on Nov. 5, 1940, from the second floor of the Nash building which became the Montgomery Ward building, on West Grand Avenue. The opening act on WFHR was the Castillians.

One of my favorite stories about that original location was about “man on the street” interviews. The broadcaster would dangle a microphone out of the second floor window and speak with people passing by on the sidewalk below.

According to the 1960 open house supplement, the *Tribune*-WFHR building was designed by Rowland Associates of Wisconsin Rapids and was notable for a process in which concrete floors were poured at ground level and lifted on permanent pillars.

Facing this unique building from the river side, you view a 16-sided, or nearly round, structure on the right, or north.

On the first floor were the studios and offices of WFHR and joint business offices for *Daily Tribune* and radio station. The second floor was home to *Tribune* news and advertising departments.

On the first floor of the rectangular building to the left or south were the press room, circulation department, mailing and carrier rooms, and a storage area for two-and-a-half months of newsprint paper. The second floor held the composing room, stereotype department and photo-engraving department.



2012 Tribune photo: Casey Lake

William F. Huffman Jr. sold WFHR radio station to Bliss Communication in 1982 and the *Daily Tribune* to Thomson Newspapers a year later. The Gannett company purchased the *Tribune* in 2000.

After 52 years in one location, the *Daily Tribune* accumulated lots of local history.

In November 2012, publisher Allen Hicks met with City Historian and longest serving journalist (Uncle) Dave Engel and struck a deal to house many of the *Tribune*’s history files in the South Wood County Historical Museum.

Before the *Tribune* move to Riverview Expressway, Uncle Dave, Museum administrator Lori Brost, volunteer Jack Wesley, and myself sorted and moved many of these archives, including priceless negatives dating to the 1960s.

A special thank you to Mr. Hicks for recognizing the value of these historic archives and for allowing us to house them in a safe location for the benefit of the public.

Story also contributed to the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune

**Lori Brost**

**SWCHC Museum Administrator**

## “The Library”

When I started working at the Museum, I found it referred to as “the library” almost on a daily basis. I love when people come in and start a sentence, “when I was little and came here,” because there is a look on their face of nostalgia, a brief return to an innocent time in the building and time spent with friends. There are memories of sisters racing to get one of the two window seats on the second floor, stories of girls going to see boys and vice versa, a librarian keeping an eye out for those daring enough to try to slide down the banister.

That was the T.B. Scott Library, our predecessor at 540 Third Street South, Wisconsin Rapids. Recently, I have had numerous people ask me who T.B. Scott was and how “his” library ended up here. And to be honest, I really didn’t have much of an answer. So, I decided it was time for me to come up with one.

Thomas Blythe Scott was born in 1829 in Scotland, the son of a tenant farmer who moved his family to New York state when Thomas was ten.

As a young adult, Thomas moved to Dekorra, Wis., near Poynette, where he and a partner ran a store. In 1851, he boarded a stagecoach for Grand Rapids. Two years later, he married Ann Eliza, the daughter of a wealthy English lumberman, George Neeves, with whom Scott joined in purchasing timber land in Sigel and Rudolph

Soon, Scott embarked on a political career. After Wood County was established in 1856 he served two terms as country treasurer and two as county clerk. In 1858, he became one of the first supervisors.

Scott, a supporter of Abraham Lincoln, was one of the driving forces in starting the Wood County Republican Party. In 1864, he was elected to his first of five terms as state senator.

Included in Scott’s business ventures were a sawmill in Merrill, a bank in Galena, Ill., and half interest in the John Edwards mill in Port Edwards. He was a director of the Wisconsin Valley Railroad and second president of the First National Bank. In

the 1860s and 1870s, his lumber empire grew to include Dubuque, Hannibal and St. Louis.

The year 1880 was labeled Scott’s “zenith year” by Ramon Hernandez, then director of McMillan Library and a Scott enthusiast. That year Scott bought full interest in the Merrill-based Scott-Anderson Lumber Co., making him and Neeves the biggest lumbermen on the Wisconsin. Scott moved to Merrill with his wife, Ann, and children, Cassie, Walter and T.B. Jr.. Six years later, he passed away from Bright’s disease, a kidney condition.

In Scott’s will, \$10,000 was left to Merrill and \$5,000 to Grand Rapids for the founding of free public libraries, which until the late 1870s were fairly unheard of. Here, the Odd Fellows had operated a library that rented books.

Scott called for “proper housing” and a temporary location was found within the J.D. Witter building on the east bank. With the help of a fund raiser at the Daly Theater, the library opened March 22, 1890.

On Jan. 1, 1892, a new City Hall was completed and Witter donated \$5,000 to purchase reading materials. In July, the T.B. Scott Library moved to the second floor of the City Hall building.

In 1900, when Grand Rapids and Centralia were combined, “City Hall” was relocated to the West Side leaving the entire East Side building to be used by the library.

In 1942, the Isaac Witter estate designated \$15,000 to the Isaac P. Witter Book Fund. A few years later, the library relocated to Witter’s former residence on Third Street after its purchase and presentation to the city by the brother-in-law of Witter, George W. Mead. Jessie Sanford, head librarian, was happy to say that for the first time, there was enough room for books on the shelves.

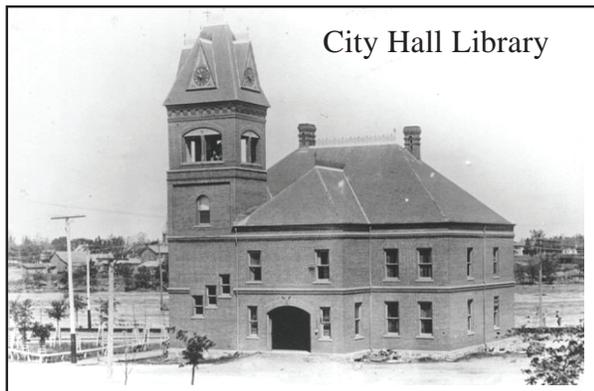
The name “T.B. Scott Library” was kept until 1970 when the McMillan Memorial Library was completed and the former Witter home became the home of the South Wood County Historical Corp.

Marilyn Slusarski

## Aunt Jessie Sanford, Librarian

On Wednesday Oct. 17, 2012, I was in Wisconsin Rapids for a gathering of my classmates from the Lincoln class of '54, with whom I meet the third Wednesday of every month. On a whim, I decided to check out the South Wood County Historical Museum. Why I had never done this before I can't figure out as I have fond memories of that building from long ago.

My aunt, Jessie Sanford, my father's sister, was head of the library from my earliest memory when the library was above the fire station in a red brick building at the bottom of the Baker Street hill where it joins with First Street.



In the mid forties, the city received the Witter mansion to be used as a library. Aunt Jessie took me to see the building and as I recall, it was furnished just as if a family was still living there. I was most impressed with the grand ballroom on the third floor. It looked so large and elegant.

Here the chronology gets a bit confusing. If the family left in 1942 and it became the library in 1948, what happened in the years in between and where did the furniture go? Did the family come back to reclaim it during those years?

My aunt's office was the former Witter family "Library" where the museum office is now. The fireplace was the focal point of the room and her desk was at an angle to the fireplace. There were dark cabinets and dark heavy drapes.

According to the archives, a room upstairs, which was the bedroom of Jere Witter, and is now the office of [Uncle] Dave Engel, was used as a

book repair room. I seem to remember a room downstairs which was used for that purpose. What I remember seeing in that room were black plaid boxes in which came supplies from the Sanford Pen & Ink company. (The company is no relation to us as far as any of us knows.) The boxes were reused many times as gift boxes on all kinds of occasions and as Easter baskets.

Aunt Jessie never married. She lived with her parents, my grandparents, on Eleventh Street North in Rapids. When her parents passed away, he in '43 and she in '44, Jessie moved into an upstairs apartment across the street from the library and my family moved into the grandparents' house.

In 1948, Jessie was diagnosed with breast cancer, had surgery and was in remission for five years. At Christmas time, 1952, she slipped and fell on the ice, breaking her back from which she never recovered. Her cancer had spread throughout her body and she passed away in June 1953 at the age of 47.

It was during those years that she supervised the transition of the library into its new quarters but she did not live to see the many years that it served the people of Wisconsin Rapids.

My personal memories of Jessie are of a devoted aunt who cared about me and took me on many adventures. She bought me beautiful dolls at Christmas time, although I was more of a tomboy and did not appreciate them as I should have. She taught me to skip and jump rope and always made sure I used correct grammar. She took me on several trips, often connected to Library business and some just for the experience.

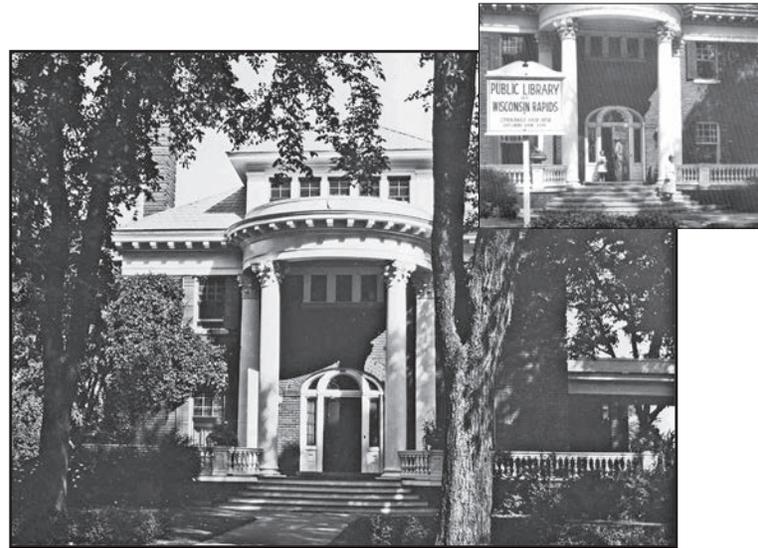
When I was about four years old, Jessie took me with her to the Stevens Point library, where she had a meeting. At noon we went to meet our cousin, Alice, who worked across the street at Hardware Mutual, now Sentry Insurance, and we all went to lunch. I was very impressed with the big steps at the library.

Many years later when I moved to Point I vaguely remembered the steps but did not know where they were. By that time the library was the

Charles M. White Library. I asked and was told that the old library had been torn down and its location is now the drive thru for M&I Bank.

Some years after that I saw a picture of the old library and the memories came back to me, especially the trip to Milwaukee when I was fourteen. We stayed in the old Kilbourn Hotel, visited relatives, went to museums and shopped in all the big stores there. The stores had such gorgeous window displays. It was 1950, before the age of the malls.

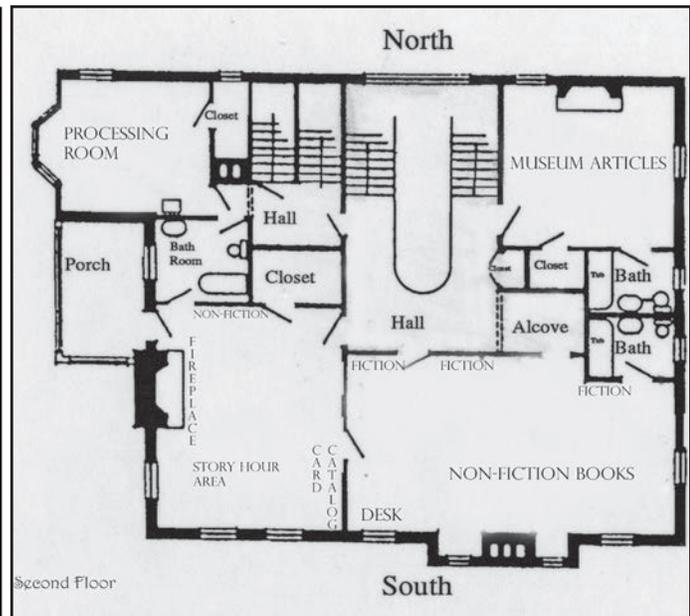
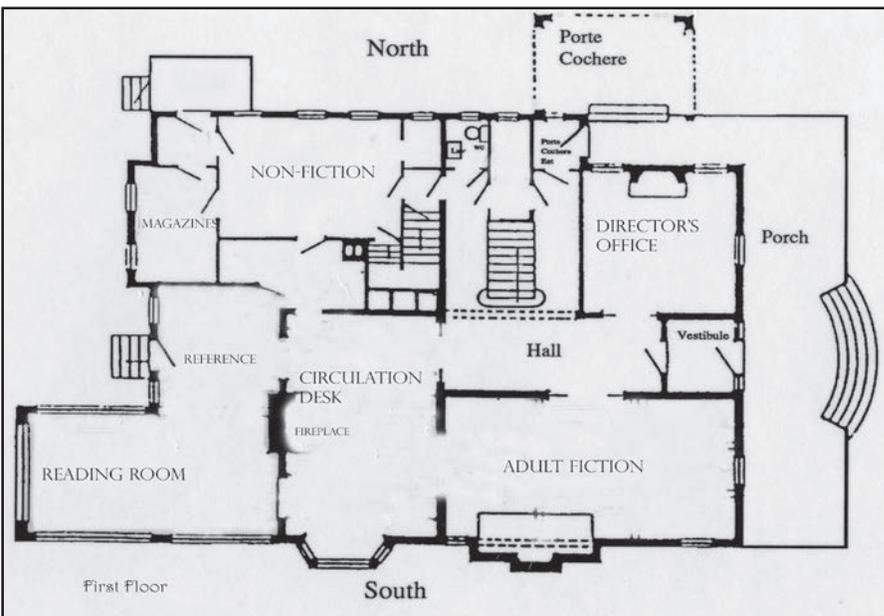
When I was in grade school I didn't like arithmetic. When I entered high school as a freshman, my Algebra teacher was Bess Hartung. I still regard her as one of the best teachers I ever had. She belonged to Jessie's bridge club. Jessie told me she did not want me to embarrass her by not getting a good grade so she said she would give me a dollar if I got an A. I did get the A, got my dollar, and went on to get many an A in math—and to minor in it in college.



Museum building as I.P. Witter house.  
Photo from Christmas card.



Right: PRESENTATION-During dedication ceremonies Monday afternoon in the new T.B. Scott Public Library, 830 [now 540] Third street south, Lelynn Trumbull (right), representing Buckley Baldwin Post 2331 Veterans of Foreign Wars, presented a four-volume pictorial history of the second World War to the library. Accepting are Miss Jessie Sanford, head librarian, and George W. Mead, president of the library board. Don Krohn photo, *Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1948.



Library Layout (SWCHC-Lori Brost)

# Area's past recreated at museum

From the October 1972 *Daily Tribune*

By David Kimball

Seventy years ago, people used potatoes instead of corks to stop their kerosene cans. Hollowed logs were used as city water pipes. Typewriters had separate rows of keys for upper and lower letters.

If you didn't know any of this or even if you did, you might be interested in the South Wood County museum open house from 1 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday in the former T.B. Scott Library building at 540 3rd St. So.

The South Wood County Historical Society has spent two years working on the building which was given to the society by the city as one of the provisions of Mrs. Mary McMillan's gift of a major part of the funds for construction of the McMillan Library.

Most of the museum's items date from around the turn of the century, although a fireplace heat breaker and a small settee were brought to the area on a raft from St. Louis in the 1860's. The main living room on the ground floor represents as closely as possibly the room as it may have been in 1906 when the house was built as the Witter residence.

The house was built during an important decade in the county's history. By 1910, the county's population had reached 30,000 compared to about 68,000 today. Lumbering was on the decline and cranberry and dairy farming were on the rise.

In 1904, Wood County voted by more than two to one for Teddy Roosevelt who beat somebody named Alton B. Parker for the presidency. And in Wisconsin Rapids, then known as Grand Rapids, the Kruger & Warner store was trying to convince people that "ready made" clothes were as good as custom tailored garments.

The museum attempts to recapture the quality of life in that time. In a large room adjoining the living room, visitors can hear tapes of historical interviews with some of the area's old

timers. A "cranberry room" displays cranberry rakes, sorters and pickers from the early days of the industry.

There is a children's room on the second floor, with antique toys, furniture and clothing, and there is an industry room with a model of the huge lumber rafts and a collection of logging tools arranged by Warner DeKarske, the volunteer curator of the museum.

Perhaps the most intriguing room in the museum is the country store and country kitchen. The store has a counter and showcase from the old George Otto store, located in the 200 block of Jackson St. A butter churn, a hand cranked ice cream machine, a cream separator, and a wood burning cook stove are some of the once familiar items in the country store and country kitchen.

Also in the museum are a sewing room, a study area for research and a medical history room arranged by Dr. Leland Pomainville, former president of the society.

The South Wood County Historical Society has been one of the most active societies in Wisconsin, having won nine state awards for its work. One of its better known projects has been the erection of nine markers commemorating historical sites in South Wood County.

Collection for the museum began more than 20 years ago [1952] when the late Mrs. Estelle Farrish first began canvassing her friends for donations of antiques for the future museum. All of the museum's pieces have been acquired through donations which the society happily accepts each week at the museum from 10 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 3 p.m. Mondays through Wednesdays.

The society also welcomes financial donations and the members hope the Sunday opening will encourage donations or volunteer help of any kind. But Mrs. B.C. Brazeau, president

of the society says the most important purpose of the Sunday opening is “above all to intensify its interest in the history of our past.”

The museum will be open from 1 to 3 p.m. for two or three Sundays following the opening and will then close for the winter until the middle of April but the society’s work on the new museum and the hunt for South Wood County artifacts will continue through the winter months.



Dr. Leland Pomainville (1907-1986), right, assembled the medical exhibit (still on display) largely from artifacts belonging to his medically-prolific family, which included his twin brother, Harold, and uncle, F.X., whose portrait hangs in photo, above, left.

1972 photos by David Rude, printed from *Daily Tribune* negatives donated in 2012 to the same Museum pictured here.





Seated in the main living room are Mrs. Neal Davis (later Georgiana Ives), Mrs. Corey (Ruth Bennett Corey) and Mrs. B.C. (Cay) Brazeau. This room now houses the Grim Natwick exhibit. Note the fireplace at right, no longer opened to view. Below: Mrs. Francis (Edith) McConnell, at the counter, her husband and Bertram Nason at checkerboard in country store.



Lighting and floor tiles continue to be reminiscent of library era.

Museum photos from *Daily Tribune* negatives scanned by C. Henry Bruse.



Above: Mrs. S.G. (Ruth) Corey with Mabel Johnson at an old cranberry sorter in the Cranberry Room.

Right: volunteer curator Warner DeKarske (died 1973) in what was the Library of the Witter home and an office for T.B. Scott Library and the Museum.



Left: Museum Children's Room in 1972, previously a work room for the library and currently Uncle Dave's office.

The bay window affords a view of the *Daily Tribune* building across the river.

Wisconsin Rapids swimming pool by east end of dam

Krohn photos 1948-52



# Thanks, Don



East Side pool, Consolidated dam in background

- Back row:  
 Sally Dickerman,  
 Kathleen Daly,  
 Mary Pascoe,  
 Marilyn Bathke,  
 Betsy Dickerman.  
 Front row:  
 Sis Parmeter,  
 Betsy Gamroth,  
 Connie Richardson,  
 Margaret Nobles



## *For the Memories*

Looking east from west end of Grand Avenue Bridge. Building at rear, right still standing.



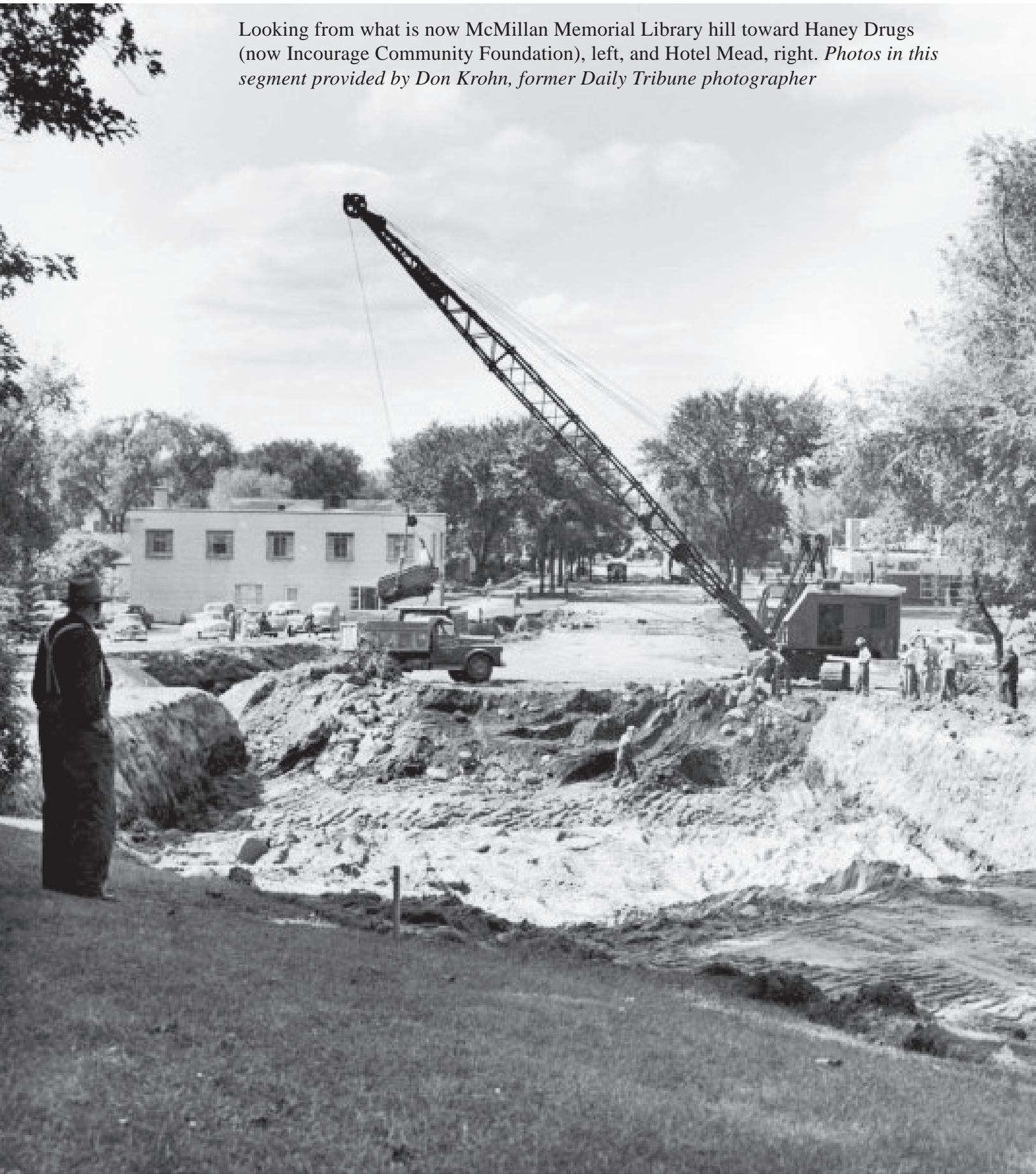


# Country School

c. 1950, by Krohn



Looking from what is now McMillan Memorial Library hill toward Haney Drugs (now Incurage Community Foundation), left, and Hotel Mead, right. *Photos in this segment provided by Don Krohn, former Daily Tribune photographer*



# Boys!



Where going and for what?

Don Halverson at piano with the Buff Wells orchestra.



Photo courtesy Kurt Halverson

Don't shoot the piano player

## Don Halverson & The Castillians

By Kurt Halverson

My dad, Don Halverson, was a Rapids native, born in 1913 to George Halverson and Ethel Hayes Halverson. George and Ethel separated/divorced after just a few years of marriage. George moved to Sacramento, Cal. soon thereafter. Ethel married Fred Haertel in the 1920s and Don lived with them. He was among the Class of 1932, the first to complete a year and graduate from the then-new (May 1931) Lincoln High School building, Wisconsin Rapids.

Because of a lack of jobs due to the weak economy of the Great Depression, Don enrolled in Central State Teachers College and car pooled to Point with other recent LHS graduates. He attended Point for three years, roughly equivalent to an associates degree. He

didn't want to teach so he didn't pursue that degree. At college, Don met his future wife, Benita, whose father operated a barber shop on the Stevens Point square.

Through the mid-30s, he had made his living as a professional musician. When Don started at the Wood County bank in 1937, he was offered more money by a big band than the bank was paying. He turned it down, knowing all too well what that could do to a marriage.

Don would continue to play professionally at least once a week most of his years while working at the bank and after his retirement in 1978. He played with big bands in dance halls all over the state, with his own big band, and eventually formed the four-piece group, The Castillians. There were many engagements

at the Indian Crossing Casino in the 30s and 40s, Golden Gate in the 50s, Bulls Eye Country Club in the 50s and 60s, Hotel Dixon's Brig and Mead Inn in the 60s, Wilbern's in the 70s and 80s, and many proms and private parties.

In 65 years, his interest evolved from big band music in the early 1930s through jazz, standards, and pop, and continued through the late 1980s.

I always remember what a wonderful time Don had. He was very social and would be the life of the party whether he was playing or not. He had a wonderful sense of humor.

Benita didn't particularly like that he was having so much fun playing. I remember her concern during my youth and teenage years.

Dad shared many stories with me, some of which I can repeat. The piano player for a touring big band that came to town got sick and needed a replacement. They tracked my dad down at the Wisconsin Theatre movie line and rushed him over to the engagement.

Playing in Hayward one night, he ran into Bill Heilman Sr. Bill needed a ride back to Rapids. Don's vehicle for his band and equipment was a hearse. Don informed Bill it was full but he could ride back to Rapids on the hood, which Bill did.

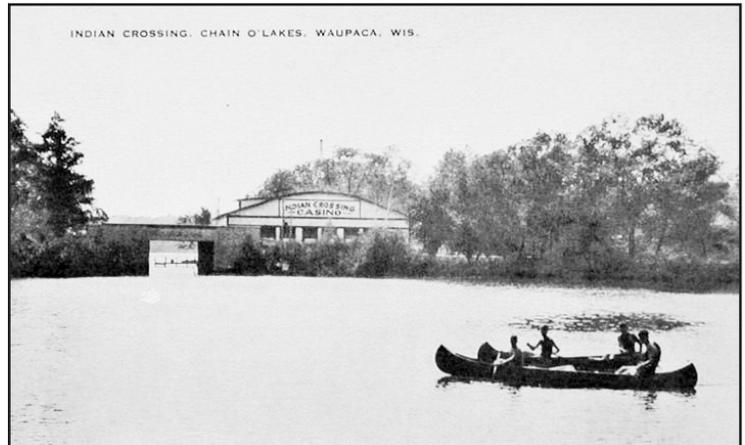
One night while playing at the long gone Armory downtown on Rapids' East Side, they smelled smoke. The fire department arrived but did not evacuate the full dance hall. Instead, they put out a basement fire. All the while, the munitions were stored in the basement under the stage the band was playing on.

An engagement in Point required an eight piece group. Don only had seven so he paid someone who didn't know how to play a trombone to sit with the trombone to his mouth and move the slide like he was playing.

When Don & Benita had house parties, mostly in the late 50s through the 70s, after enough drinks had been consumed, the guests would plead for him to play. Everyone would shout out their favorite song and Don would entertain.

When my wife, Kelly, and I were dating in the 60s, we would stop at the old Brig bar.

It was fun listening and watching and seeing what fun the Castillians were having. Most of the crowd at the bar were friends and long time followers of the band's music. It was more like a house party. After the Brig closed, this continued many more years at Wilbern's until they closed.



Editor: "The Casino" opened in 1925 on the Waupaca Chain of Lakes. It has been in turn an entertainment mecca for the swing band generation and the rock 'n' rollers.

In the former era, the Castillians were frequent performers, along with the likes of Woody Herman, Eddy Howard and the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra. In the 1960s, acts included Ricky Nelson, Bobby Vee, the Beach Boys, the Everly Brothers and a Buffalo Springfield event attended by Uncle Dave and several unruly cohorts.

In the same era, Dave and classmate Kurt Halverson lodged in adjacent rooms of Sims Hall, at then-named Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point, where Kurt's all night counsel and humorous monologues were of inestimable value.

Dave and Kurt had been acquainted since First Methodist Church Sunday School and, in the early high school years hung out together at Lincoln games and dances and at the Palace. At evening's end, Kurt would call his dad, Don Halverson of the Castillians, who would graciously drive in from Children's Choice Road to take the boys home.

## The Little Garage House

By Diane Maerz Podawiltz

On Valentine's Day, 1952, Ray Maerz found a few minutes during his shift in the Port Edwards paper mill finishing room to ask Emma out on a date for the following evening. After they became engaged at the end of March, Ray often joked that he was "finished off in the finishing room."

Shortly after their engagement, Emma took Ray to meet Helen, a childhood friend of hers. When Helen asked the date for their wedding, Emma replied, "As soon as we find a place to hang our hats."

Helen pointed out her window at the house next door and replied that the house was for sale with everything that had been left in it. The wife had been killed in a car accident and the husband and their young daughter moved in with his parents.

A phone call directed Emma and Ray to the deceased woman's parents in Pittsville who were willing to finance a mortgage on the little house. The "loan interview" with the woman's father, Fred, consisted of talk about farming and crops, safe ground for Ray because he had farmed with his folks in Hancock. However, Ray was concerned about the lack of discussion about employment, income, etc. and finally worked up the nerve to ask about the mortgage. Fred replied that they had the loan and talk returned to farming.

For the next 19 years, Ray and Emma never went to a bank, credit union or savings-and-loan. Loans for adding onto the little house or purchasing cars were taken care of through Fred in his living room.

The house they had purchased at 1231 10th Street South was a "garage house," a way to afford a home of one's own. With the initial loan, a lot was purchased and a two-car garage was built. The garage was fitted out inside with a wood floor or linoleum tiles over the cement garage floor and divided into four rooms: a kitchen with cupboards that would later be removed and installed into the final kitchen; a dining room; a living room; and a bedroom.

When the mortgage was paid off on the land and this structure, another loan would be taken

out to build the house and the garage house would be turned into its intended purpose as a two-car garage. At least that was the plan.

Instead, my parents kept the garage house intact and added onto the structure.

The first modification came in 1953. A wall was built down one side of the bedroom, making a closet and a tiny bathroom consisting of only a sink and toilet.

Up until then their "fine facilities" consisted of an outhouse in the backyard. Proud of their new bathroom, they took a picture of the house showing the new bathroom window.

Even though the property was inside the city limits city sewer and water lines didn't happen until summer of 1957.

In the spring of 1959, my folks added on a utility room with cellar, a one-car garage, a front room (living room), a second bedroom with bath and a small porch with jalousie windows. The addition of a shower to the original bathroom and a bathtub in a new bathroom finally replaced taking baths in a galvanized tub in the kitchen.

The neighborhood was quite different from today. Pictures my mother took in 1953 show 10th Street South to be a one-lane dirt road, running past their house.

My mother told of walking downtown on my dad's payday to pay bills and run errands. They only owned one car and my dad had taken it to work. She walked to the west side of Grand Avenue to go to the bank, pay bills at Church's drug store, and pick up necessities at Anderson Drug and Woolworth's. She finished at Johnson Hills, buying produce and meat in their downstairs grocery department. Then she caught a cab to take her home.

When she gave the cabdriver her address, he looked back at her and said, "Lady, the street doesn't go that far!" She replied, "Oh yes it does! I just came from there!" The cabbie shrugged and told her it was her money. To his amazement there were several houses down on the street that "didn't go that far!"

Continued on page 24



*Looking west* toward 8th Street from 1231 10th St. S. in 1953 there is nothing but a field and the backyards of the houses on the east side of 8th Street South. If one were to stand in the same spot today the “view” would only go to the houses on the other side of 10th Street. Beyond that would be houses on 9th Street and the backside of Aldi’s.



*Looking south* toward Daly Avenue and railroad tracks in 1953.

cont. from p. 22

It wasn't only the cabdriver that didn't know there were houses that far south and east in the city.

If one stands on the street in front of this house today and looks southward, the view consists of Daly Avenue and a row of evergreen trees acting as a sound and visual barrier. Beyond is Riverview Expressway, and beyond that, the Shopko and Copps complex.

A photograph from 1953 shows single dirt lane Daly Avenue running parallel to the railroad tracks, approximately where the expressway is now. Beyond the tracks are fields with trees off in the distance.

Pulling the railcars until 1953 or 1954 were steam engines that sometimes started grass fires. My mother kept an undated newspaper clipping from the *Daily Tribune*. In part it reads,

"Engine No. 4, the new Wisconsin Rapids fire truck, made its maiden voyage to a fire Thursday afternoon. The pumper, out for only 14 minutes, was used to extinguish a grass fire along the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad tracks on 10th St. So."

She kept this clipping because she was the one that called the fire department, probably the second time she called because of a fire. Her pet peeve with the fire department occurred when the coal clinkers started a fire along the tracks.

Like the cabdriver, the fire department apparently was unaware of houses on the little dirt lane. Instead of coming to fight the fire on the side where the few houses stood, they chose to go to the south side of the fire.

To keep the grass fire from setting fire to the little garage house, my mother's friend and neighbor, Helen, brought over their garden hose. My parents did not own one. Hooking it up to the outside faucet, the two women became their own firefighting team.

Even though they were officially in the city, there were still remnants of the country. Even as late as the early 1960's it was not unusual to be sitting and eating breakfast on a warm summer morning with the windows open and hear the cows leaving the barn at 1310 Daly Avenue and heading back out into the fields.

When my dad dug a garden for my mother, an old wooden wrench was found that was used on

wagon wheels. Someone told them it was likely for a circus wagon because that area had been where the circus used to set up camp.

The feeling of being nearly in the country became a concern in November 1957 when my dad had to go into work while police and sheriff's departments were looking for Ed Gein, who had killed two women down in Plainfield. My mother's solution was to keep her cat, Whitey, in the house because, "he'll hear anyone outside before I do," and to keep her #12 cast iron fry pan close at hand.

A little to the southwest of our home was a Quonset hut that was used by Miller Tire as a warehouse. It stood in what is today the middle of the expressway. It was there through most of the 1960s and possibly earlier.

Our cat, Whitey, would go hunting for mice in the fields. Sometimes he wouldn't come home in the evening because he would be purposely shut into the Quonset to catch mice. He'd appear the next morning within minutes of the men starting work, with a tummy full of mice, very thirsty, and tired.

While most people fertilize their lawns, my parents always said that they "could grow moss out in broad daylight." Before this area was split up into lots, the owner stripped the black dirt off and sold it. Instead of fertilizing their lawn, my dad put lime on yearly to sweeten the soil. They were happy when clover would finally grow in the backyard.

The little garage house was added onto. More homes were built. The one lane dirt road became blacktop with curb and gutter and streetlights. The railroad disappeared and was replaced with the Riverview Expressway. St. Vincent de Paul School and Church were built a few blocks away and streets and homes expanded rapidly to the east.

In summer 1970, 10th Street South became the main artery for accessing businesses on the east side of 8th Street South while 8th Street was enlarged and straightened to become the four lane it is today.

Ray and Emma's marriage lasted nearly thirty years, until my mother passed away. Five years later, my dad sold what had once been their little garage home.

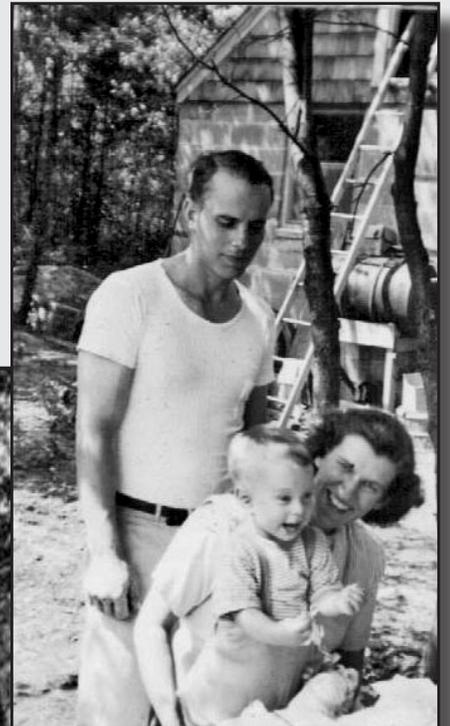
## Maerz garage house



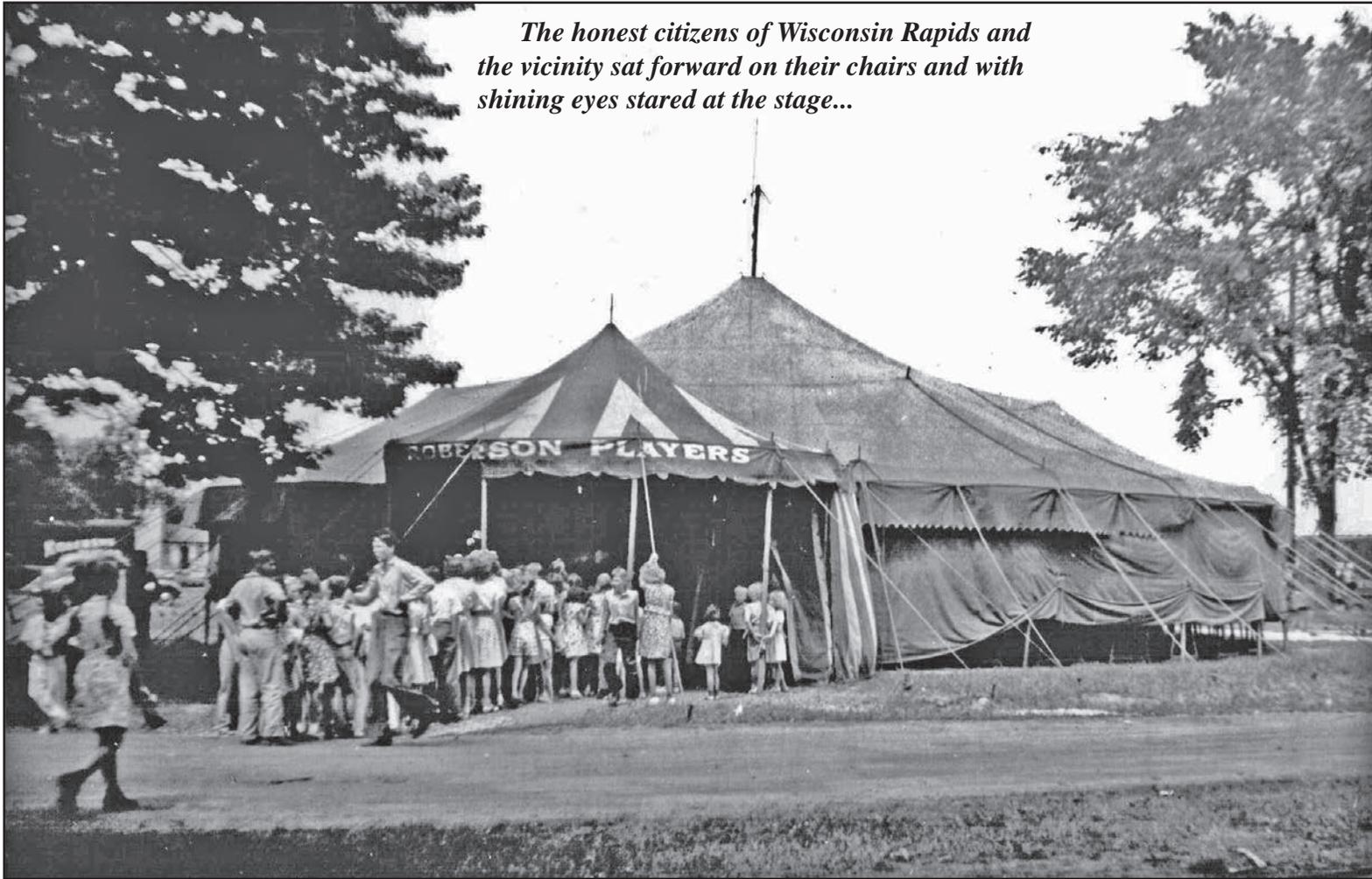
### Same Plan, Different Address

Below: 1946 photo of the house on Clyde Avenue built by Donald Engel, like the Maerz house, meant to become a garage with a larger house added to the side. However, the Engels changed their mind and built on Two Mile Avenue. The garage house still stands alone awaiting the promised companion.

Right: Donald and Arline (Sally) Engel with one-year-old David on Clyde Avenue.



*The honest citizens of Wisconsin Rapids and the vicinity sat forward on their chairs and with shining eyes stared at the stage...*



## *Roberson Players Tent Show Theater*

*For Ellen Sabetta*

Answering some requests can take a while.

Thirty years ago, then South Wood County Historical Museum curator Ellen Sabetta urged me to look into a cherished topic: the Roberson Players tent show of her childhood. Now, it is possible to fulfill that request with La-Z-Boy research obtained exclusively from Internet sources.

The eponymous George C. Roberson, an Evansville, Ind., native, went “on the road” early in the 20th Century, playing the juvenile lead in “Shepherd of the Hills.” After appearing in New York productions, he toured in “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine.”

George soon became known as owner and producer of the Roberson Gifford players with

a crew as large as 35 touring the Midwest in summer and moving southwest in fall. According to the July 20, 1923, *Daily Tribune*, “This company of clever artists have appeared for many years before the public in our neighboring cities, but on account of conflicting dates were unable to play Wisconsin Rapids before. You will surely enjoy the play, the vaudeville between the acts and above all, the snappy Jazz Novelty orchestra.”

A 1925 ad touted 25 “people” and five vaudeville acts appearing in a tent on the West Side market square and in Nekoosa. The show cost 40 cents for adults and a dime for “kids.” Ladies were free with a paid ticket, an ongoing policy.

In 1929, at the West Side market square, plays presented were "Ella Cinders," "The Unkissed Bridge," "The Unwanted Child," "The Gorilla," "Peg O' My Heart," and "Which One Shall I Marry?" Said the *Tribune*, "The Roberson Players have an entire new outfit and is one of the niftiest and classiest tented theatres entour on the road this season.

"Besides the usual high class vaudeville specialties offered with this company, between acts, Kaaihue's Hawaiian Orchestra as an added attraction will entertain you. They are singers and players of a thousand songs. You are assured a good, clean, wholesome amusement, well worth your time every night during the week, with a change of program nightly."

The 1931 location for the "big dramatic, musical and vaudeville show" was one block north of the Dixon Hotel on Fourth Avenue.

In 1933, the Players entertained the Kiwanis club in the Rose room of the Hotel Witter. In 1937, they were at the winter rink grounds on Third Avenue North.

Richard S. Davis provided a generous description for the July 24, 1938, *Milwaukee Journal*. "It was up there in the lively paper mill town, Wisconsin Rapids, the city that straddles the foaming river...one of the most delightful experiences ever found in the unpredictable institution known as the drama."

As customers arrived, Roberson greeted many by name, "children mostly with a good sparkling of swains and maidens from the country and farmers and their wives."

The play that night was "The Lonesome Pine."

It paused now and then, said Davis, "for some entirely extraneous comedy, but that was quite all right. There was a deal of hocus pocus and that was all right, too.

"The honest citizens of Wisconsin Rapids and the vicinity sat forward on

their chairs and with shining eyes stared at the stage. Babies got hungry and were nursed in the semidarkness by mothers who were not ashamed. Lovers held hands and, in the more romantic situations, sat with heads very close. Weather beaten older folk, of town and country, drank in every last word."

After the show, Davis found the cramped trailer Roberson shared with his wife and co-player, Phoebe Fulton.

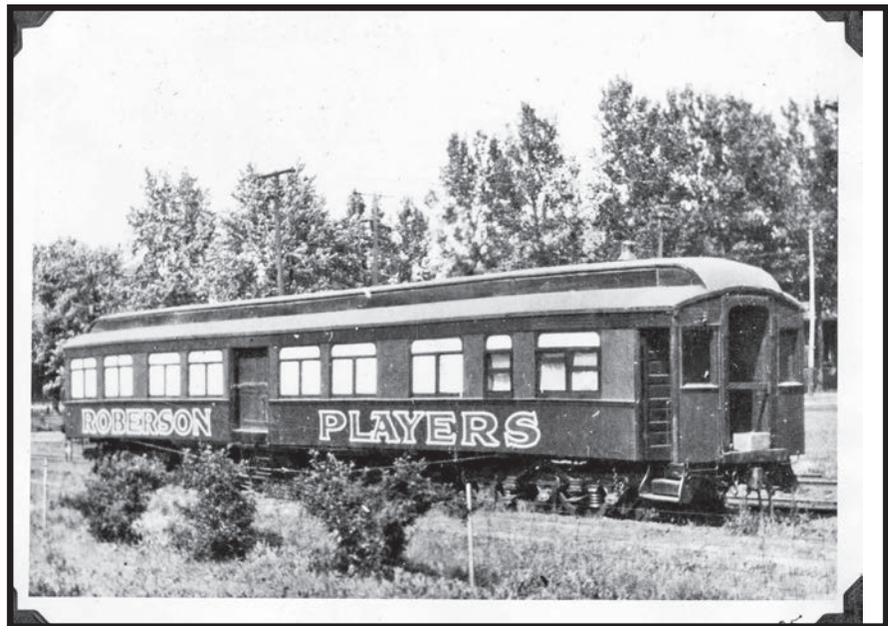
Impresario Roberson smoked "one cigaret after another" and said how he loved touring the "sticks" where "the folks who flock to his tent were sincere and dependable..."

"It's great to come back to the same friends year after year, to watch the kids grow up and take the reserved seats, and finally to send their kids along with sticky dimes. It's grand to stand outside and say, 'Hello.'"

In the late 1940s, the show location moved from the winter skating rink grounds on Third Avenue North to "Bender Field," apparently the current Mead Field.

In winter, Roberson and Phoebe ran a motor court in St. Petersburg, Fla. and took a portable roller rink on the road in summer.

Roberson was helping arrange stage settings for a charity show in 1954 when he suffered a stroke and died, at age 64. His widow, Phoebe, according to some Internet sources, may have lived almost half a century more.



*Earle Garber*

## First Big Box Store

The Johnson & Hill department store is history. What we see driving west on Grand Avenue and Third is a still-attractive three-story Cream City brick building that has found other uses, now modernized with smaller windows, among the few noticeable changes.

In 1887, Johnson & Hill Co. mercantile concern opened its wood frame store on land now occupied by the Mead-Witter block. The business had grown into two more adjacent buildings by the time the partners sought financing from J.D. Witter's bank.

The *Wood County Reporter* and the *Wisconsin Valley Leader* described the excavation early in 1910 even as some wondered about the wisdom of the plan.

The population in the city of Grand Rapids (Wisconsin Rapids) in 1910 was 6,521 and seemed to be shrinking. Editors worried about the store location. Was it too far from downtown? And could the enterprise be too large for a community that may have seen better days now that the logging and river rafting eras were long over?

Numerous establishments and factories had gone out of business or were about to: flour mills, box factories, furniture factories, a brewery, a

foundry and a half dozen retail stores. Merchants who were members of the Commercial Club pushed for action, in part through a theme contest in which "The Will to Win" was the winner. Sound familiar?

On the plus side, five paper mills were converting from pulp to newsprint while researching and innovating to reach emerging markets. We now know how successful they became at the height of the "Age of Paper," as described in Uncle Dave's 1986 book.

In August 1911, Johnson & Hill opened its marvelous facility. It was steam heated and had a sprinkler system. Electric lighting from chandeliers hung from a vaulted ceiling over dry goods, millinery, clothing and gent's furnishings. There was a mezzanine level of shops and services—a soda fountain, restaurant, beauty-parlor and travel shop surrounding the second level.

Each department had its own pedestal telephone (black Bakelite plastic) along with a pneumatic system that carried sales slips from each department to a pay booth on the main floor in the center of the store for customers to pay for

Digging Johnson Hill site



Don Krohn photo:  
Johnson Hill store  
background.



and pick up their purchases. There were writing tables, dressing rooms and rest rooms for men and women. Floor walkers directed shoppers.

The third floor held furniture and women's foundations and ready-to-wear, carpeting, decor and drapery. A full basement held groceries and a butcher shop with cold storage supplied by the Grand Rapids Ice Machine Company on one side, hardware and sporting goods near the passenger elevator. It boasted a freight elevator in the warehouse and parking tie-ups for horses and wagons along side the building.

In March 1912, the headline read MAGNIFICENT EMPORIUM OPEN FOR TRADE. "Thousands of our Citizens Pay Their compliments to the old firm in the new store."

Looking ahead through the decades, how many residents remember Oscar and Millie Adler and

the love affair that lasted a half century while they danced away Friday evenings at the Bull's Eye Country Club.

Millie had the beauty parlor on the mezzanine next to the elevator. Below and to the right was Oscar's shoe and repair department and a shoe-fitting X-Ray stand next the lift.

With three viewing ports, kids could step up to view their toes wiggling through Buster Brown high top leather shoes while mom peered from her port and Oscar on his side made sure of the fit.

Considering the years Johnson & Hill store served the community, this early general/mercantile/department store was a first for a small community, a half century before Walmart and Target *et-al* began their move. Wisconsin Rapids is fortunate the building survives as Schreiber Properties and a state of the art office building.

*Killed in Action*

By David Laspa

## The Genial, Unfortunate, Capt. Stevens



After the fall of Fort Sumter, Wisconsin Gov. Randall called for a regiment of militia to help the Union put down the southern rebellion. The first company here, the Wisconsin Pinery Rifles from Grand Rapids and Plover were reported to be of the Republican persuasion.

The May 11, 1861, *Wood County Reporter* described the second new militia company forming, the Grand Rapids Union Guards, composed of Democrats.

Among them was Samuel Stevens, born Feb. 13, 1836, with connections in the Dexterville area. Stevens did not let political parties affect his patriotism. Even though he was Captain of the Union Guards, a June 1861 *Reporter* said, "S. Stevens contributes \$1.00 to defray the expenses of Beaver Dam Rifles," a regiment that included the Republican-friendly Pinery Rifles.

After the departure of the Pinery Rifles, political characterizations here ceased and the Union Guards were the toast of the town. The June 22, 1861, *Reporter* said S. Stevens was chosen secretary *pro tem* of a July 4th meeting.

*Reporter*: "Our streets during the evenings of the past week have been thronged with citizens watching the Home Guard as they proceed with their drill. The company, under the command of Capt. Stevens, will prove an efficient corps should they be fortunate to be mustered into service." When the Union Guard was presented with a flag by ladies of Centralia, Stevens responded with a few appropriate remarks.

When Stevens was appointed captain, he was 12 men short of a company. He and Lemuel Kromer looked for recruits in Stevens Point and a July 1861 *Reporter* stated Capt. Stevens returned from recruiting in the "upper country."

On Aug. 26, 1861, the Union Guards left for the railhead at New Lisbon amid shouts of "God-speed" and arrived at Camp Randall in Madison to begin their training. Said the *Reporter*, "Mr. S. has labored long and assiduously to accomplish his objective and he has succeeded though not to the extent of the desired 60 names on the rolls."

The Sept. 21, 1861, *Reporter* noted that Grand Rapids Union Guard was now Company G, 7th Regiment. That day, they left Camp Randall and headed to Arlington, Va. Chicago papers give high compliments as Co. G. 7th Regiment marched through that city.

On Oct. 1, 1861, the 7th Regiment was brigaded with the 6th Regiment and 2nd Regiment from Wisconsin and 19th Regiment from Indiana. This was the beginning of the famed Iron Brigade.

A Nov. 10, 1861, letter from a soldier of Co. G of the 5th Wisconsin at Camp Griffith in Northern Virginia said Capt. Sam Stevens with others including Abner Atwood (alias) Towhead, had visited.

On May 24, 1862, due to a long illness, Stevens resigned as Captain of Co. G of the 7th Regiment and returned to Grand Rapids. Members of his company wrote to the *Reporter* "to express our satisfaction as to the ability of the said Captain as an officer; also, that we find him to be a man of principle and honor, and wherever fortune may direct him, our best wishes will be with him."

"Towhead" Atwood sent a letter dated Jan. 15, 1863, from "Belle Plane," stating that, "We had heard that Sam's wife has presented him with a young Captain. Bully!"

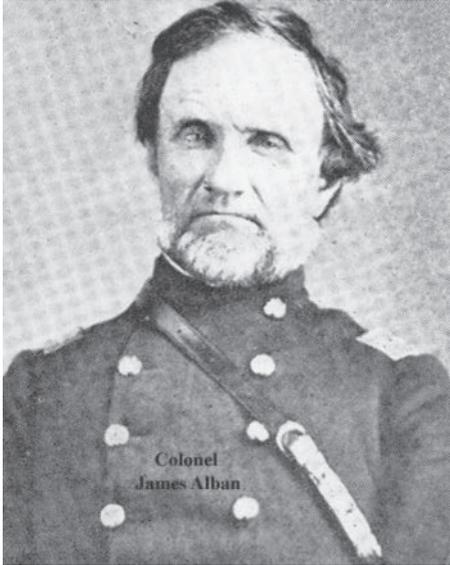
Stevens recovered and returned to the war. On April 16, 1864, he was appointed Captain of Company A, 37th Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. Of his death June 18, 1864, the *Reporter* said:

"Gone—Capt. Samuel Stevens, formerly of Co. G, 7th regiment, but more recently holding a command in the 37th Regiment, was killed before the works of the enemy in attack at Petersburg.

"Our citizens all knew Capt. S., and a more genial, whole-souled fellow never resided in our midst. Sam has paid the debt of nature, serving his country as a true patriot. His family in their bereavement have the sympathy of the undivided community."

*Killed in Action*

By Maj. Billy Parker

*Portage County township bears name of*  
Col. James Alban

On April 7, 1810, a figure that would come to shape central Wisconsin history was born in Jefferson County, Ohio. He was James Shane Alban, whose first appearance in Wisconsin history was in the 1830s when he explored Sauk County with his partners Eben and Rosaline Peck and, for the purposes of Euro-American settlement, “discovered” Devils Lake, now one of our most popular state parks, and started a mill along the Baraboo River.

In 1844, after the death of his first wife, Amanda Alban, James settled at Plover, Wis., where he started the very first newspaper in that Pinery village, called *Plover Herald*. The *Herald* ran under the motto, “Union Forever, Slavery Never.”

Alban was also an acting surveyor who laid down a line from Plover to Amherst, marking the road that is now Portage County Highway B. You can still see where he made a mistake. Almost to Amherst, there are two right angle bends as the surveyor gets back on course. Alban was also a lawyer and judge in Plover.

At the start of the Civil War, he recruited two companies of infantry: one from the communities of Steven Point and Plover and another from

Grand Rapids and Centralia. Because of these two companies, then Governor Alexander Randall appointed Alban Colonel of the 18th Wisconsin infantry regiment. Thus, Alban was a political appointee with no prior military experience.

The 18th trained all winter of 1861-1862 at Camp Trowbridge in Milwaukee, Wis. In late March, 1862, the 18th shipped out to the front with General Grant’s army, then at Pittsburgh Landing, Tenn.

Arriving on April 5, Colonel Alban and the 18th arrived with no ammunition, the State of Wisconsin thinking they would be supplied when they got there.

Unfortunately the Confederate army attacked on the morning of April 6 in what would be called the battle of Shiloh. With the camp overrun and the 18th’s flag left behind in Col. Alban’s tent, the local boys fell back into an area of the battlefield now known as the Hornets’ Nest.

Here, Colonel James Alban was shot off his horse. He died on the morning of April 7, 1862, his 52nd birthday. His body would be brought back home, a rare event for a Civil War soldier, and buried in Plover under what is now the oldest gravestone in that village.

Alban’s estate would help start the townships of Grant and Alban, both in Portage County.

The 18th Wisconsin would go on to fight at Corinth, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Sherman’s March to the Sea and the surrender of Gen. Johnston’s army at Durham Station. The 18th would later participate in the Grand Review in Washington D.C.



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RECORD SHEETS UNDER COVER FARM RECORD CALENDAR VALUABLE INFORMATION INSIDE

Phil Brown's Den of Antiquity

Early "farm record" calendar on 2012 display at the Museum. Many JH customers lived in rural areas and came in for Friday or Saturday night shopping.