



August 2005 Volume II #6  
*South Wood County Historical Corp.*

# Artifacts



## *Where the living is easy*

**Don Krohn photo** above shows the “White Sand Beach” at South Wood County Park, Lake Wazeecha, circa 1950, when the popular flowage on the Four Mile Creek was about fifteen years old. The “Red Sand Beach” upstream to the east was family-friendly but stained bathers’ feet.

**Contents** of this issue: Joan Haasl, 2-3; Phil Brown’s Den of Antiquity, 4-5; Chadwick photos, 6; Bar R Ranch, 7; John Vicker, 8-9; Big Kahuna, 10-11; Earle Garber, 12-15; Krohn photo, 16-17; John Billings interview, 18-29; Readers Write, 30; At McMillan, 31.

Joan Haasl

## *The Wisconsin*

The Citizens National Bank on West Grand Avenue was a symbol to my mother of all the bad investments my father had made. She was angry about every one. The warehouse full of booze in Chicago that burned to the ground. The Oriental rugs that were fakes. The mouse trap factory on the East Side river bank. The traps were too strong for mice and not strong enough for rats. The Prentiss-Wabers stock that never paid a dividend. The old building next to Mike Geoghan's News and Toy Shop that leaned so much Mike threatened to sue. Somehow Pa had the old wreck straightened. So there was always something for Ma to grumble about and the bank thing was the one that came up most frequently.

My mother was impressed by titles. To her it meant the person was really somebody. So it's hard for me to believe she wasn't delighted when my father became a trustee of the Citizens National Bank. They couldn't know at the time what that title would eventually cost, and all the bitter fights it would cause.

Ma never liked Charlie Briere and blamed him for getting Pa into the bank mess. But when they got involved, the bank was solid and very few people accurately predicted what was just around the corner, the crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. My mother's cousin, Califern "Nan" Chamberlain, was married to Harry Walker, a bank examiner. Harry had examined the Citizens Bank and declared it sound. Shortly thereafter, it went under. So, when the folks fought, blame was thrown back and forth, Ma calling Pa a fool and Pa saying "What about Harry saying the bank was 'sound as the dollar?'"

When the bank went under, the trustees had to make good on deposits. Pa had to borrow to pay his share. On top of everything else, it was a real tough thing to go through. I often wonder how Pa kept his sense of humor and was almost always cheerful; but, perhaps his extreme high blood pressure and heart problems were the true indication of how much stress he endured without a word of complaint.

The post card I have of the bank shows a substantial grey stone structure, much like banks all over the country. After several years of being empty, the Wisconsin Theatre was built around it and was the lobby area. By the time the Wisconsin was torn down, you could still see some of the bank building at the top.

I have lots of happy memories of the Wisconsin. A pretty theatre, a good movie and tasty popcorn made for an enjoyable evening. As we walked across the Grand Avenue Bridge, the wires crossing the river would be black with birds.

One evening I especially remember was in the spring of 1946. My friend Isabel and I had gone to the show. When we came out, Keith Roberts was waiting for her and Butch was waiting for me. We had sodas at Kerrins Candy Store and Keith walked Isabel home and Butch walked me home to 14th Street.

One of my sons used to say to me "simple minds are easily amused." In those long ago days, we must have all had simple minds because we were easily amused and it seemed a far happier time. The old theatre was a big part of those happy days. Maybe a sign should be erected on the empty space where the Wisconsin stood saying "RIP good and faithful building." (See additional bank story on page 4.)

---

JH

*Joan Haasl*

*Up River*

Up River!

My mother and brother hated the cottage. Bill claimed the air caused his hay fever and allergies to flare up. He said the same about going to church picnics and trout fishing. I have always loved going “up river” to the cottage above Biron. The cottage was a comfortable and comforting place. Casually furnished with a screen porch, it caught every breeze.

The old boats on saw horses. Wood boats with metal patches and Pa with a bucket of white lead. How I loved the look of the white lead in the sun. The whitest of whites, it glowed. Pa would take a stick and smear the white lead on the patches and seams of the old boats.

We would use cane poles to fish. Wedge the poles in the rocks and go play. Pull the poles up from time to time and nearly always have a fish on.

I lost a big one once. It dropped off the hook over the rocks and I couldn’t grab fast enough. It got away and I cried and cried some more. In those days, walleye weren’t considered anything special. Northerns were the trophy fish, and we pulled some big ones out of the river.

My Dad would have his cronies there for poker games from time to time. Frank Rucinski told me my Dad would hire him to set things up. This meant a huge lunch for the boys. Frank said he’d get big bologna, cut about a ½-inch thick, for sandwiches. Plenty of pickles and beer and mix for hi-balls. These were often all night affairs.

Before Bill and I were born, there were parties for couples. My mother said some of the fellows brought girls who got drunk and made fools of themselves. My mother did not enjoy these parties and rarely went to the cottage after we were born.

In winter, Pa and I would take corn for the deer to the cottage. There was an old bridge on the road above Biron that rattled when the car rolled across it. The rattling noise scared me and I was glad when that bridge was replaced.

As soon as Pa died, my mother sold the cottage, which, given the family finances, was necessary. I would have liked an easement to the river so I could have a dock, or a small amount of the several acres Pa owned. That was not to be, but I still enjoy car rides past where our cottage was. “Up River” has a mystical fascination for me and always will have.

---

*JH*

A regular feature from a SWCHC board member, historical collector and Cranmoor cranberry grower



## Phil Brown's Den of Antiquity



The Citizens National Bank, built in 1917, didn't survive the Depression as a business. By the time the building was razed, it become known mainly as the Wisconsin Theatre.

If you have items such as those pictured to share with our readers, let me hear from you.

*Phil*



Above, Phil begins saving for retirement. When filled, usually by school children, the metal container was opened by the sponsoring bank. Below, a small promotional plate, dated prior to 1920. On the postcards at right, note the rise in assets from 1916 to 1921.

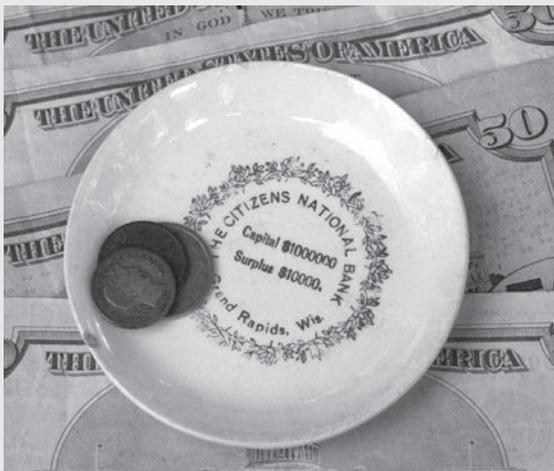
POST CARD  
GRAND RAPIDS, WISCONSIN

CONDENSED REPORT NO. 25-1916-25-75

**The Citizens National Bank**  
GRAND RAPIDS, WISCONSIN WIS.  
as made to Comptroller of Currency  
NOV. 17, 1916

E. E. Claflin  
City

RESOURCES	
Loans and Discounts	\$150,514.52
U. S. Bonds	100,000.00
Other Bonds and Securities	92,976.54
Banking House and Fixtures	15,567.91
Due from Treas. U. S.	5,000.00
Cash and Due from Banks	48,570.36
	\$412,569.63
LIABILITIES	
Capital Stock	\$100,000.00
Surplus and Profits	17,899.62
Reserved for Taxes	1,500.00
Circulation	100,000.00
Deposits	193,776.01
	\$412,569.63



Condensed Report of the condition of  
**The Citizens National Bank**  
WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WIS.  
at the close of business Feb. 21st, 1921.

Jacob Kissinger

RESOURCES	
Loans and Discounts	\$301,281.01
U. S. Bonds	164,603.49
Other bonds and securities	219,841.98
B'n'g. House, Furn. & Fix.	51,722.34
Due from U. S. Treasurer	5,000.00
Cash and due from Banks	207,094.91
	\$949,543.73
LIABILITIES	
Capital Stock	\$100,000.00
Surplus & Undivided Prof.	15,688.53
Circulation	100,000.00
DEPOSITS	733,855.20
	\$949,543.73



### *Citizens National Bank*

At top, photo postcard from Wisconsin Rapids (after 1920) shows a fairly new Citizens National Bank on West Grand Avenue. The Mead Witter block has not yet been built across Grand.

At left, below, an enhanced postcard from "Grand Rapids" (prior to 1920). At center of photo below right, the Wisconsin Theatre building in 1993. See the Joan Haasl story in this issue for background on the bank and the May 2005 *Artifacts* to view the theatre front with marquee.

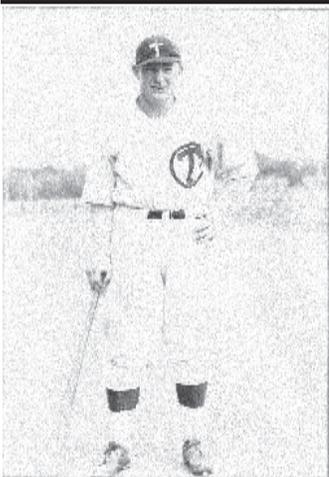




### Chadwick

See May 9 and June 6, 2005, *River City Memoirs* in the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* for stories about Jake and Dorothy Chadwick. (Note the foot of interviewer Jim Mason at bottom of photo at right.)

John J. Chadwick was born Feb. 20, 1908. He died June 28, 2005.



Jake Chadwick came to Wisconsin Rapids as a semi-pro baseball player. He had also been a professional basketball player. (Above, 1931, Joplin.)



# Bar R Ranch

Photo originally appeared in *Artifacts V*



*Letter from Sally Romanski Cook*

The Bar R Ranch was located in the town of Seneca and was owned by my parents, Leonard and Jeanette Romanski. We raised Hereford cattle and also had horses. The ranch was in operation from 1949 until 1966.

My father was also the owner of the Rapids Market which closed in 1955.

Both businesses were family operated. My two older sisters, Jane and Marjorie, were employed at the store full-time after graduation from high school. They kept things running smoothly while my dad divided his time between the store and the ranch. The two middle girls, Betty and Mary Jean, traded off working in the store and at home while the two youngest girls, Sally and Susan, were home full-

time. Our mother ran things there. We girls became quite adept at running farm machinery, making hay and doing chores.

The picture of the four girls with the steer was taken at the Central Wisconsin Junior Livestock Exhibition in 1951. This event was held in conjunction with the Adams County Fair in Friendship, Wis. We showed cattle there for twelve years and won many ribbons.



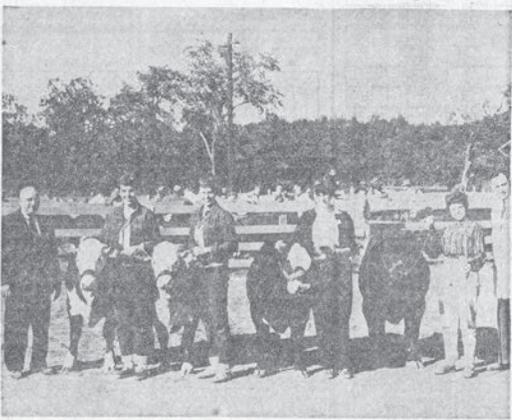
Pictured in the photo are (left to right) Susan, Betty, Mary Jean and Sally Romanski. Our animals were sold at auction on the last day of the show. Johnson & Hill's was a regular supporter of Wood County exhibitors and purchased many of our steers over the years.



## "Here it is Folks"

The Central Wisconsin Junior Livestock Exposition!

# PRIZE BEEF



**CLUB STEAKS . . . . .**

**SIRLOIN** PIN BONE CUT . . . . .

**CHUCK ROAST** ANY CUT . . . . .

**BEEF SHORT RIBS . . . . .**

**BEEF STEW** BONELESS . . . . .

**KETTLE ROAST of BEEF . . . . .**

PURCHASE WINNERS—Shown here are four (4) of the eight (8) Prize winning steers purchased by Johnson Hill's at the Central Wisconsin Junior Livestock Exposition. — With Chet Bell and Ray Pelier of Johnson Hill's are Susan Romanski, Wisconsin Rapids, Sally Romanski, Wisconsin Rapids, Beverly Smoker, Plainfield and Marion Drew, Oxford, 4H Girls who raised and showed the fine animals.

*John Vicker*

*Ouch!*

In 1926, my Mom had to go uptown shopping. She put me into the back seat of the old Buick and, without looking to see what I was doing, slammed the car door.

“Ow! Ow! Ow!” I screamed.

“Now, what’s the matter?”

“My finger is in the door.”

“Well, next time, keep them in your pockets,” she said, as she opened the car door.

Then, “You got blood all over the window. What did you do that for?”

By now, I peeled my finger from the door frame and looked at it. About one half of my finger was all flat. She took her hanky, wrapped up my finger and said, “Now! Get ALL the way into the back seat and don’t drip blood on anything. Do you hear me?”

Ten minutes later, we got to my dad’s place. Mom got out, opened the back door, grabbed me by my good arm and hauled me into the men’s room to try to clean me up. What little blood I had left in my finger had leaked all over my pants. Even the hanky was dripping. Mom squeezed my finger so that it was round again, wrapped it up in an old bar rag that she tore in half and tied it up.

My dad said to leave it on for a few days. That way, it would stop bleeding, and he was right. I ran out of blood and it stopped bleeding but the poor finger was about twice its normal size and all red and purple.

My mom would hold it, squeeze it a little and tell me, “Now see what happens when you don’t listen to your mother.”

John Vicker

### *Junction City Graphite*

This is the tale of two mines, Wisconsin Graphite Company and Pioneer Graphite Company. They are both north of Junction City on Highway G.

Joe Ciaglo, who was an employee of the Pioneer Mine back in the 1940s, took me over to see Mrs. Muriel Taggart, wife of one of the Taggart brothers, Webster and Gordon. Their father Frank was the manager. It was once reported in the *Stevens Point Journal* that Frank had found gold there.

The two graphite mines are about 500 yards apart. The first is the Wisconsin Mine with a shaft running in a northeast angle of 45 degrees with level shafts running in both sides of the main shaft. The large pit is right behind the Taggart home about 50 feet west. The pit is 30 feet deep and in the center you can see the mine shaft.

Then Joe took me to see the Pioneer Mine. The main office had been right next to the road. There is no sign of it. About 200 feet farther in, I found five broken-up wood casks or barrels full of graphite. Farther away was what remained of the grinding and drying building. It was built of field stone and two walls are still standing. There is an open well there in the grass, so we had to watch our step.

We went another 200 yards back in to see the mine shaft. This is also a big open pit, oval in shape and filled with water with the shaft in the center. The hoist building has caved in over the shaft, which is a good thing because if it wasn't and you fell in and could not swim, you would be in real trouble because it's 80-feet deep. The shaft hole is 8 feet by 10 feet and 50 feet down. There is a 10 foot tunnel to the west. They had a four-cylinder Chevy engine to pump the water out each day. This was one of Joe's jobs. Thirty feet further down were two 40-foot tunnels running east and west.

The mines were started in 1893 and closed in 1909. The Pioneer Mine was reopened in 1940, but closed after a year or so because of the poor grade of graphite.

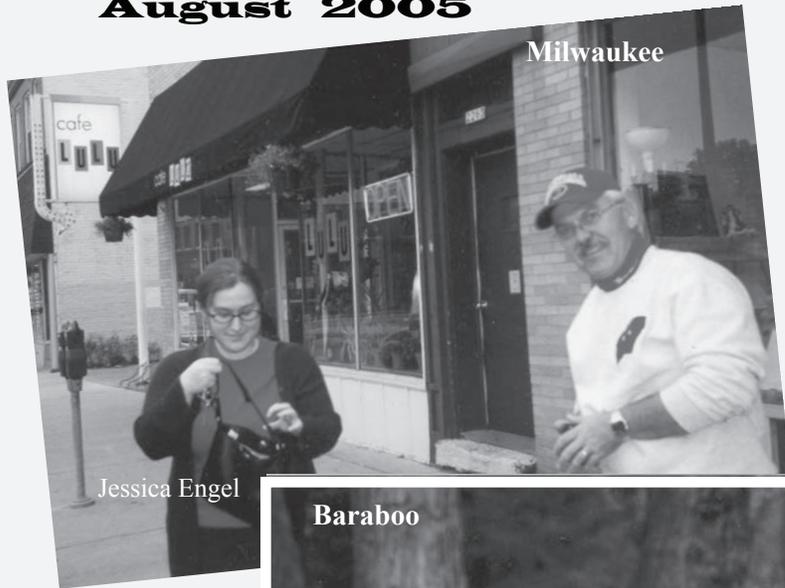
Mining graphite was very hard work. It was all done with picks and shovels. Ore was loaded into a large bucket which was pushed back to the main shaft on rails. The bucket was winched to the top where the contents were loaded on a truck that had hard rubber wheels.

Graphite was worth about three cents a pound and was used for tinting paint. This was cheaper than lead or oxide.

The Pioneer Mine was destroyed by a tornado in November 1908 and was re-built. The first carload was mined in August 1909. Shortly after, it was again destroyed, this time by fire.

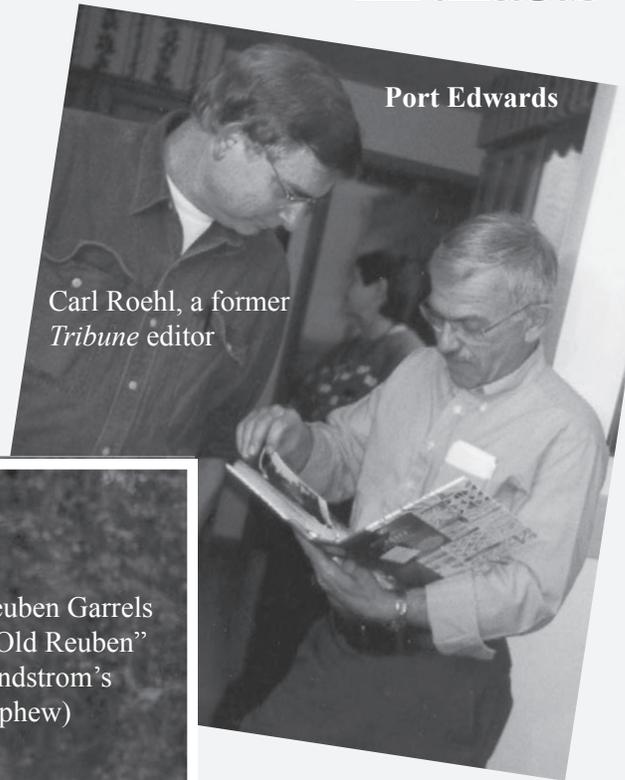
There is still a danger of cave-ins and open wells on the property, so NO ONE is allowed on the property anymore. The property owners have advised me that all trespassers will be taken to court.

Mrs. Taggart was so kind to me and gave me some samples. Some contained pyrite, antigerite, copper, quartz and hematite. This was all in low-grade carbon. All the other samples were of high-grade graphite with no impurities. The high-grade samples were so good that you could write a letter with them.



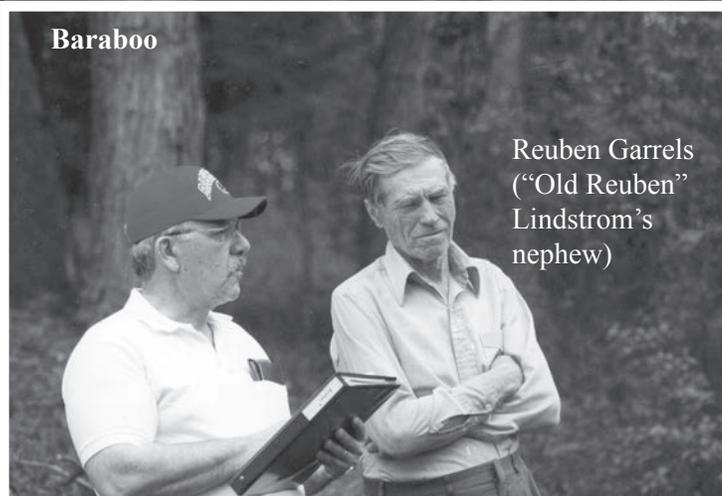
Jessica Engel

Milwaukee



Port Edwards

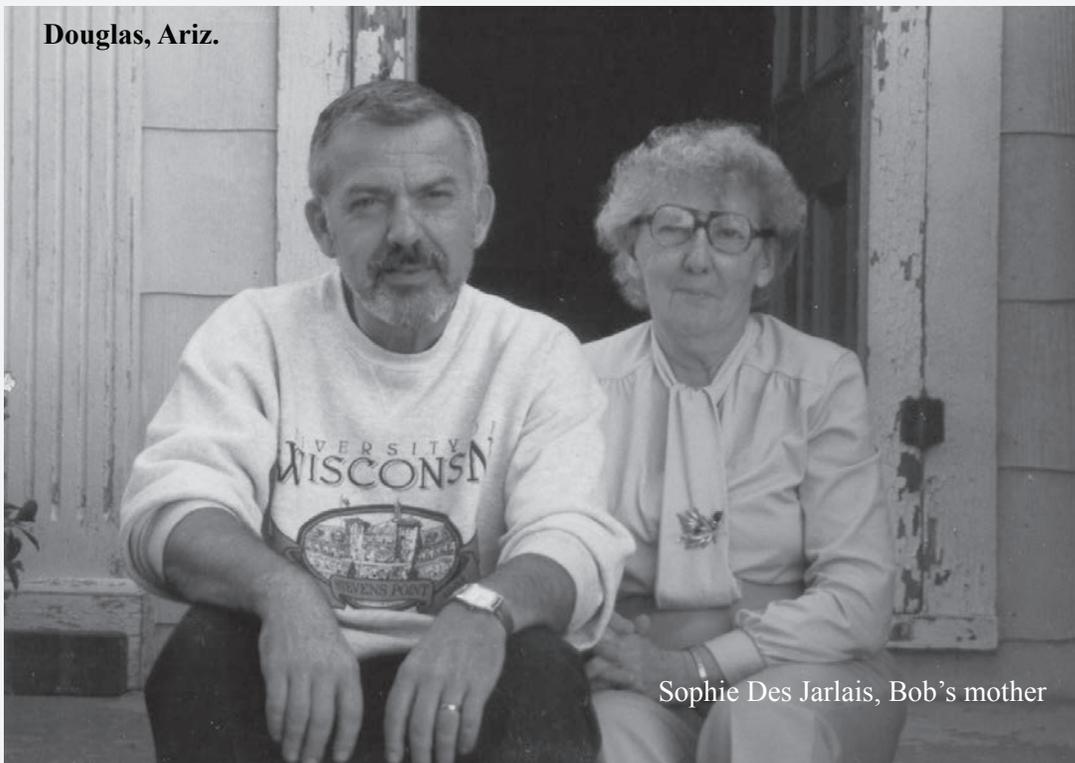
Carl Roehl, a former Tribune editor



Baraboo

Reuben Garrels ("Old Reuben" Lindstrom's nephew)

***Postcards of The Big Kahuna***



Douglas, Ariz.

Sophie Des Jarlais, Bob's mother

***Suitable for display on the refrigerator door***

Robert Des Jarlais, (1940-2003) the “Big Kahuna,” and former *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* editor, was a “people person,” as shown by postcard photos current *Artifacts* editor Dave Engel sent to “Mr. Kahuna” throughout years of road trips. (See March 28, 2005, *Tribune* for more.)



Calumet, Mich.

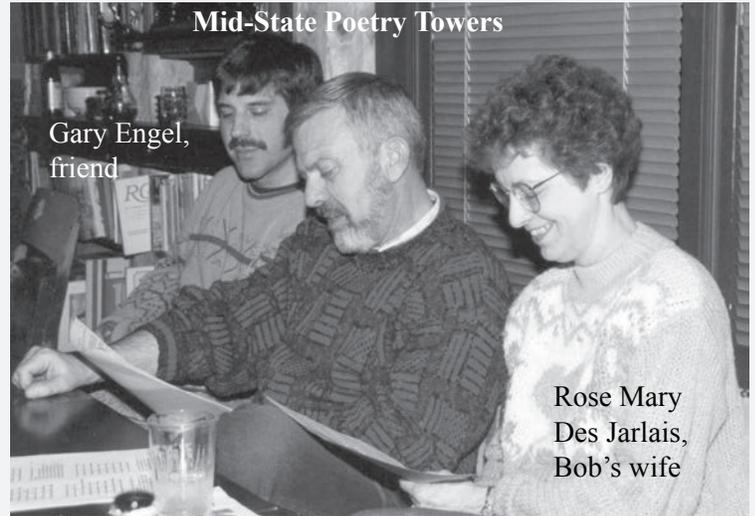
Tom Blessing, editor

t. kilgore splake,  
poet



Andy Des Jarlais,  
Bob's son

Milwaukee



Mid-State Poetry Towers

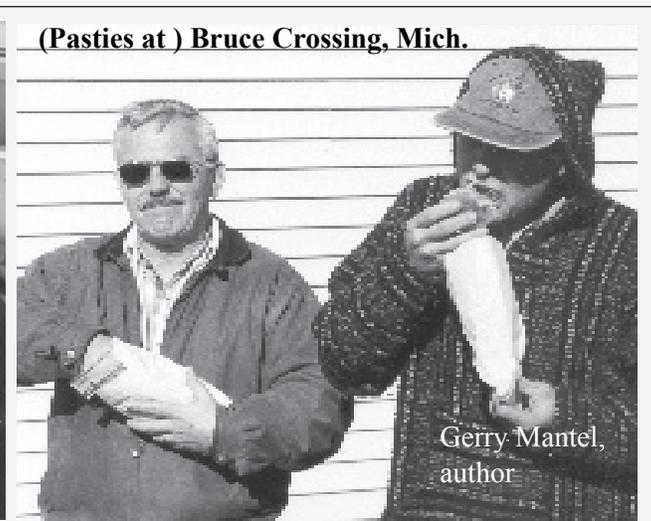
Gary Engel,  
friend

Rose Mary  
Des Jarlais,  
Bob's wife



From the Ground Up, Wis. Rapids, 2003

Pete Frank,  
former  
*Tribune*  
news editor



(Pasties at ) Bruce Crossing, Mich.

Gerry Mantel,  
author

# Earle's Beat

by Earle Garber

What was it like, living between the tracks and the Bushnell tank farm?

In the 1920s and 30s the road from Fourth Avenue wasn't paved. My mother and I would jump from puddle to puddle, through torrents of rainwater or snow melt to Rickoff's Grocery: Milk, bread or eggs were 10 cents. On my own, often with a dime in my pocket, I would walk the rails or skip across ties along the mill spur track used to supply the old pulp mill wood room. A block west, the graveled Fifth Avenue ended at our house with an outlet along the spur track back to Fourth. The parking lot of Consolidated's Number 16 machine replaced it.

The house was an up-and-down duplex we shared with the Narel family. The Saturday night bath was tolerated. I could knock on the wall and the girls next door would answer. We had indoor plumbing and a small cast iron coal stove in the basement that took forever to heat water. That house had been purchased, cut in half and moved to stand adjacent to a magnificent three story warehouse my grandfather built using cast off brick and timber from the sawmills, wagon and furniture factories of years past. The town was making room for the paper mill.

Grandfather's warehouse housed the Wisconsin state highway sign shop in a drive-in basement. A coverall factory was upstairs and the main floor was stocked with used inventory collected with grandfather's first big move.

In those days, the scrap yard was on Fifth Avenue in front of the Henke house. The Mrs. wasn't too pleased. When I was a mere tot getting ready to walk to old Emerson School, she often let me know while hanging her laundry.

A few years after Black Monday's 1929 bank closing, when I was in Kindergarten, grandfather sold the factory to Biron Cranberry. He would take a loss and move to a vacated blacksmith shop on McKinley Street.

The business survived another forty years. Years later, my uncle Ben, my grandfather's brother, joked about the business they were in. His name on the business card read "Ben Garber M.D. - R. E." Metals Dealer – Recycling Engineer; he was a man ahead of his time.

During my years at Emerson School, we were introduced to music and learned with a Tonette, a white plastic whistle we learned to play on. The black mouthpiece, if overblown, made a shrill noise, but we learned to read music and we played simple songs and we gave our folks something to cheer about. It was like "The Music Man," a sort of music make believe, to bring out the best of us. We were dressed in red crepe uniforms, long pants and jacket with paper milk bottle caps covered with white crepe. When we played, it must have been wild, like a passage from "parade of the animals."

In those days, kids often came down with German measles. The Doc called it Rubella and the health department posted a quarantine sign on our door. Dad went to live with his father and I was wrapped and fussed over for the next six weeks. When the quarantine sign was finally taken off the door, our family moved to the east side. It was that day that what we later called the Montgomery Ward Block burned. With only one bridge on Grand Avenue, our car bumped over a number of fire hoses as they directed us around the fire trucks. My sister and I covered our ears from the clamor of sirens and bells. We could see streets crowded with spectators.

The house on 8<sup>th</sup> Street had been a farmhouse Grandfather purchased and remodeled. We were across from what is now Warsinske Motor Company. My kid sister and I could now walk to old Howe school, the city's original high school. I would enter fourth grade; sister B. J. would start kindergarten.

At Howe, the band program used real instruments. In fifth grade, I suppose because my dad played horn in city band and made a few dollars at dances, Grandfather thought a cornet for me would be a good move. He paid for it with \$10 and a used sink, a small fortune in 1936 when most families were living on less than fifteen dollars a week.

When my friend, Wally Ives, describes me as a more legit trumpeter, he isn't that far off...

But trauma followed through fifth and sixth grade. Sour notes were like being knifed, my dad would say. In fifth grade, band director Aaron Manus signed me up to play the National Anthem for a Mother's Club finale. Standing up in front of all those ladies I missed the high G and I wanted to quit.

About that time the school board elected to transfer Howe School kids in seventh and eighth grade to the third floor of Lincoln High School, now East Junior High on Peach Street. The band and orchestra department at that time was on the top floor of the old Witter Building next door, where vocational classes, welding and auto-body shops and drafting were held. The second floor was for home economics (nutrition, cooking and sewing). Chorus classes were held in a little theater in the Lincoln Building.

So, not to disturb the classes on the first and second levels, music students used the brick cement steps of the fire escape attached to the side of the old building. Though it was enclosed, it was unheated and a steep climb. By then, my cornet case was banged up. We were always in a hurry in winter and would run from Lincoln's south door, about 50 yards, to the stairs. One day, as I reached for the door at the top of the stairs, the case opened and the horn rolled down a flight. Dad agreed to take me to Daly Music. We picked out a silver Holton cornet.



Joe Liska, a fine violinist and director of the high school orchestra, had already moved to Rapids years earlier to take over the orchestra program. By the time I arrived he had built a strings program few schools in the state could compete with. Then band director Aaron Manus left Rapids to go to Medical School. Roger Hornig followed him in 1941. There wasn't a prouder kid, the day Mr. Hornig told me to suit



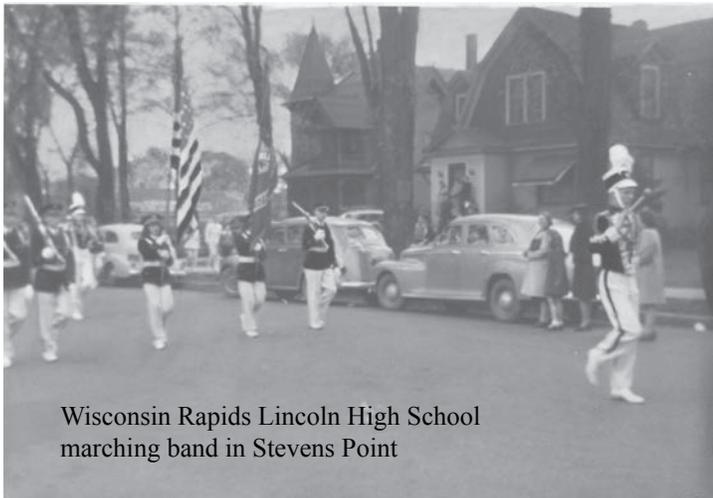
1942 Swing Shifters: Left to right. Back row: Dana Norman, Don Murgatroyd, Myrtle Timm. Second row: Ewald "Ed" Murgatroyd, Hank Acott, Earle Garber, Jack Kahoun, Bob Brehm. Front: Ken Burmeister, Shirley Fuller, Irene Knuth, Wayne Williams.

up for the high school band. He was a strict guy. We knew if we were late or had no written excuse he would point toward the door. I was in seventh grade. We practiced to stay in the program. Then the draft started. Roger Hornig left to tour with Army stage bands.

By then Mr. Liska had a family and he was exempt from serving. A new band director was hired in 1942 but he wasn't up to our standards. After a few months a student sit down strike occurred. Mr. Elliot resigned. We were spoiled.

The school board must have felt that, until Roger Hornig returned, the director of the city band, Bernie Ziegler, a former teacher and insurance man, could take over. Roger Hornig returned in 1945 as the war wound down, in time to save the band. Ziegler did well; it's just we were a pretty high-class gang. I followed older kids, mentors like the Corey boys, Kahoun, Rickman, Timm, Brehm, Williams, Norman, Knuth, and the Acott boys – serious people that organized the first Swing Shifters jazz band.

All the guys were called to service. Only the pianist, the alto sax player, the vocalist and I were left.



Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln High School marching band in Stevens Point

During the last year at Lincoln several of us received a first star in the state contest in Madison. We competed with schools across the state. That evening I was asked to perform in the old music school church building on Madison's Park Street.

It was that evening I decided a small school would be better for me. Joe Liska had suggested Ripon College, where I studied with Maurice Weed, a trumpeter from Eastman and John Peterman, a vocal coach from Northwestern, both great men who talked me into auditioning with Renold Schilke then with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He taught at De Paul University.

Mr. Schilke took me to Eldon Bengel, a custom maker of trumpets, where I acquired my first hand-made instrument. After leaving Ripon, Mr. Weed and Peterman both left Ripon College. Peterman took over the Choral department at Northwestern University in Evanston and Weed returned to Eastman in Rochester for his Ph.D.

It's interesting how we make decisions. My roommate at Ripon, John Painter, later became director of bands at Northwestern University. The guy who chided me into shaving with a blue-blade razor, George Conant, found his way into the Denver Orchestra. At De Paul, I worked with another classmate, Vince Cichowitz, a student of Schilke's, who went on to Dallas, and ended his career with the Chicago Symphony.

While my potential was strong at the time, my knowledge of music and transposition was poor. I competed with kids who studied privately from the get-go, kids far more sophisticated. I decided to shift, to earn money, and transferred to the Chicago Musicians Union and played with a number of house bands: the Palmer House, the Edgewater Beach Marine Room, several jobs at the Aragon and Trianon and Green Mill ballrooms.

The next summer, I toured with Sherman Hayes, another hotel band. We opened the Shamrock in Houston, the first hotel to be built after the war and the Roosevelt in L.A. in a ten-week tour. Then an agent from Barnes and Caruthers, who booked state fair shows, talked me into leaving school altogether. It was a terrible decision.

When my friend Wally Ives talks of me as a strong legit player, I suppose he is right up to a point. I had a good deal more formal training, but for a kid, the show work was more laid back, more fun and the Barnes and Caruthers Company pit band employed many guest artists, who would become imbedded in the



With Barnes and Caruthers stage band at Wisconsin State Fair, Earle Garber, center

Earle  
2005



Dave Engel

movie industry: Billy Rose Aquacades, Johnny Griswold, Olsen and Johnson Ice shows. It was exciting, but too much of a good thing takes a toll. A year later, living out of a suitcase, worn out, I went home.

By 1953, I entered the family business, representing companies who were supplying the swift growth of the pulp and paper and chemical plants in Wisconsin.

Back in Rapids, Roger Hornig asked me to assist him with brass sectionals at Lincoln High, in their new music department addition, and to share my experience with Renold Schilke. We convinced the Chicago Symphony Brass Quintet of Herseth and Schilke, Christiful Jacobs and Farkes, each a world class musician, to perform in the Lincoln field house. When the call came from Mary Heart Academy in Pittsville for help with their drum and bugle corp., a couple of seasons time was set aside.

My playing back home, off and on, consisted of city band, the Central Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra, local jazz groups like the Castillions,

the Larry Woodbury band out of Hancock, Benny Graham in Stevens Point and a number of old-time groups around the state. Now you know. I enjoy being in city band, the adult band at the Cultural Center and sitting next to children who know just what they want to be in life.

*Earle Garber is 77 and still playing.*



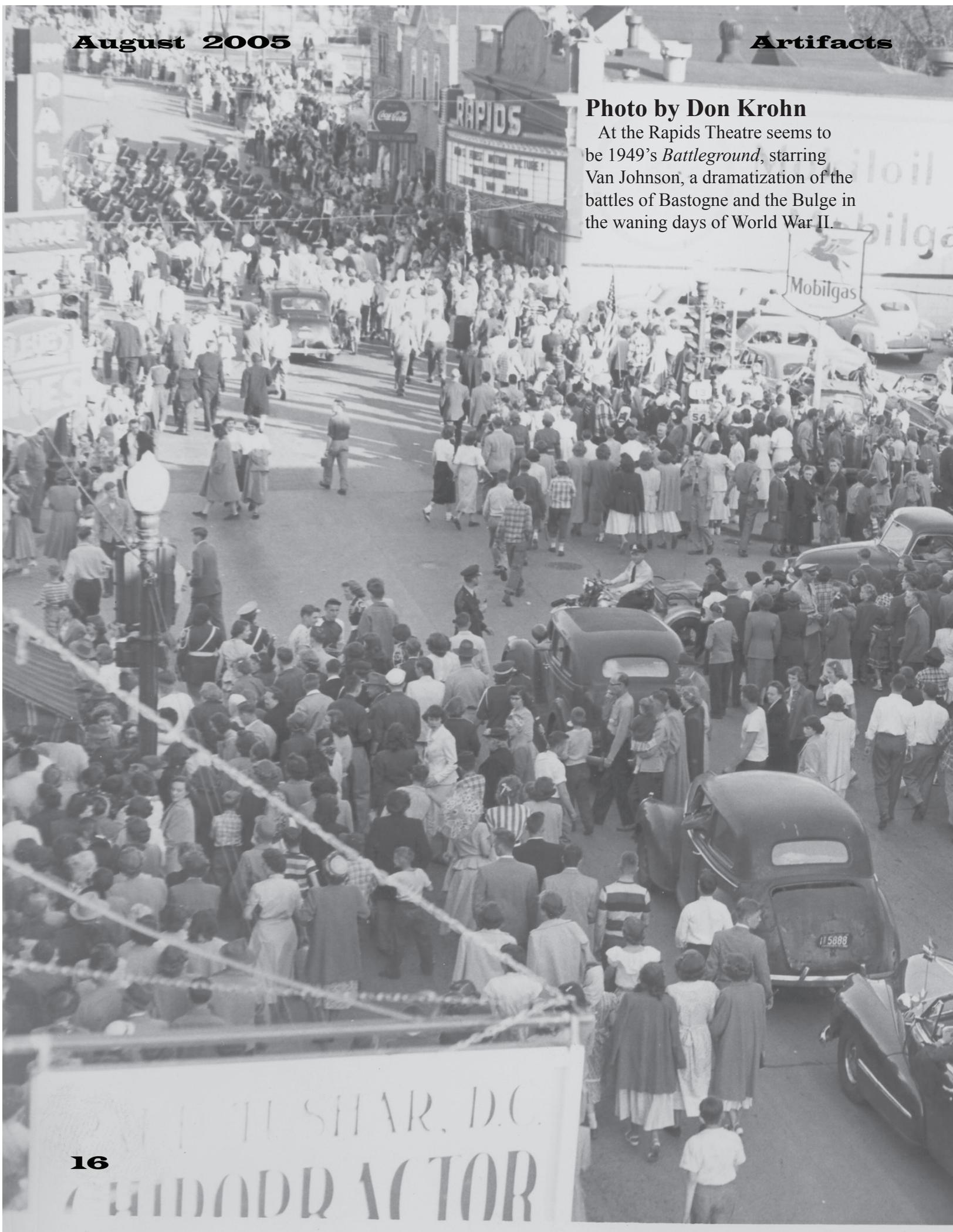
Earl Garber, independent, will give the band that "hot lips" swing at the concert next week. Garber was a first division winner in the 1946 state solo trumpet contest. He also held second chair in the all-state band for four years. He holds the first chair in the Ripon band.



OUTSTANDING MUSICIANS—Two young musicians who will be heard today and Wednesday when the Ripon College band presents its concert in George Conrad Gymnasium. Above and left Garber, Wisconsin Rapids, played first chair trumpet last year with the Ripon Symphony under the direction of Edger Peterson, and was first prize in a state solo contest, and is second at the state. Garber has been playing trumpet since year and left first chair in the Wisconsin Rapids High School band last year. He is a first division winner in the 1946 state solo contest and is a member of the band. The concert will be held in the auditorium of the George A. Wood.

Photo by Don Krohn

At the Rapids Theatre seems to be 1949's *Battleground*, starring Van Johnson, a dramatization of the battles of Bastogne and the Bulge in the waning days of World War II.



...TUS SHAR, D.C.  
CITIZEN ACTOR



Our 20<sup>th</sup> Century  
*John Billings*



*The Complete Interview with Dave Engel*  
9 February 2005

Dave Engel: I've interviewed you about four times already, I think. I know there's a lot left. I've looked over that whole first interview and that was a good one. The one you and I had at the museum.

Billings: Oh, was it? That was kind of lengthy. You had time that day, you didn't have anything to do, and I had less. And, ah...

Dave: Well, you were working at the museum.

Billings: Yeah, yeah. But, I mean the fact that you had all kinds of time to devote to it.

Dave: Well, that was a two-taper that day.

Billings: Is that right?

Dave: This is a one-taper today.

Billings: Those things I don't understand, but, I believe you.

Dave: Well, the tape is 90 minutes.

**Nash**

Dave: Tell me about some of the Nashes you knew through history in Wisconsin Rapids. And, if you could sort them out, that'd be helpful, too.

Billings: You know, the Nashes came in through Rudolph way back when. And, you maybe heard mention on many occasions that Tom Nash was kind of the founding father, so to speak of the Nash group, and, that's the fellow that built the big home that Stanton Mead lived in.

Dave: He's the one that founded Nekoosa.

Billings: Yeah, he was all over everywhere. He worked on the railroad, things, anything to make money and earn. Apparently they must have been very foresighted and, everything, because he told about such things that he did when he worked on the railroad that he would get produce and put it on the train and ship it like down to Chicago and, have it sold in that area, to have a place to unload it. So, then...

Billings: There was Guy Nash, who lived up at 1020 Oak Street, and then there was J., what was his middle initial, J.L., I believe it was, Jim, Jim Nash, and he lived next to the museum, with the big pillars, the big white house... Lawrence Nash lived over, across from the Congregational Church, in that house that's still there. That was L.M. Nash.

Dave: The old L.M.?

Billings: Old L.M. Nash lived there. And, of course, he had a family, several children, only one girl, Mrs. George Mullen. And the rest were boys. And there was Charles, there was Neil, who was in Port Edwards, there was Lawrence, there was Will, there was, did I say Charles? Then George, and they were all business people in the community. And they were old L.M. Nash's sons.

Billings: I think that whole family, and to my knowledge there were very few children in that group. George never had children with his wife, Peck never had children, Charles never had children with his.

Dave: Now, you didn't mention the word Peck before?

Billings: Peck was a nickname for Charles. And everybody knew him as Peck Nash.

Dave: Why did they call him Peck?

Billings: I don't know that part of it because when I came here he was already Peck. And he and George stayed with the old gent, old L.M. and ran the hardware store. It was on the corner of First Avenue and West Grand Avenue, and that's a big parking lot for Consolidated now. First off, it was Nash's Hardware, and it was a nice business. And there were other people involved in it, but the Nashes got them all out in a fashion.

Dave: It became Montgomery Wards?

Billings: Yes, it was a grocery store, and all kinds of things.

Dave: They sold cars there.

Billings: Yeah, in fact, the Nashes sold Whippets, and they sold Willys Knights and Falcon Knights.

Dave: Did you ever have a Whippet?

Billings: I saw a Whippet many times, and my brother-in-law, my family, my wife's family, I should say, correctly, all thought the Nashes were great. And they were all Irish together, Irish Catholics, and they thought the world of the Nashes and they wouldn't buy anything unless it was from the Nash family. And so, my brother-in-law always drove like an, what did they call it, a Red Bird, Overland Red Bird. And my father-in-law had Willys Knight, and they all came from Nashes. And, they were well-thought of in the community, that family.

Billings: Well, I think, I think maybe Will would have been the oldest of the Nash sons.

Dave: And, he, what did he have?

Billings: He had one son, Bill Jr. And, then, I would have thought that maybe Lawrence was next. He did better, though, he had one son, Garrison. Now, you see, as I tell you these names, if you just think for just a minute, a prominent family at that time was the Garrison family. So you see, they were connected with the Garrisons, the Nash family, the Lawrence Nash family. And, that's why they named this one boy, we called him Mike, but his name was Garrison Nash.

Dave: And, this Lawrence, was it Lawrence E. Nash?

Billings: L.E. Nash, and then there was Neil, and he was, stayed in Port Edwards, or lived in Port Edwards. And, he used to live in the, what we would refer to as the carriage house out in the back yard of the YMCA. Was that building there when you?

Dave: Yeah, I remember that building.

Billings: Well, that's where the Neil Nashes lived.

Dave: You mentioned that Nash that lived next to the museum (south of).

Billings: That was Lawrence E. Now, he by the way, had girls. And he had at least three children, three daughters. And then, this one boy, Garrison, I told you about. Garrison Nash.

Billings: And then there was Charles, Peck, Nash that I was telling you about earlier, and he married late in life. I would think he was in his fifties. And he was always in the store. He worked in the hardware store.

Dave: As a clerk, basically?

Billings: Of course, they owned the store and the old gent would be there, and then these two boys. And the other one that was in the store was George. And he married fairly late in life, but not anywhere near

Charles, "Peck." And he and his wife, they didn't have any family.

Dave: That's Peck and his wife, or George and his wife?

Billings: Neither one of them, and those two brothers worked in the store, George and Peck.

Dave: Did they have reputations of a certain sort?

Billings: Well, you gotta be careful with that. There's still some Nash connections around. Peck was, had a reputation and I won't go any farther than that.

Dave: As somebody that liked a good time?

Billings: Definitely. Like I say, he married a school teacher here in town. I'm trying to think of her name, she had an Irish name.

Billings: I gotta be careful here that I don't get off into another tangent with this. See, there was another family of Nashes that lived in the big white house next to the museum (north of) with the pillars up and down the front of it.

Billings: That was James Nash.

Billings: Right, yeah. He had, now this was another family now you understand. He had three girls and one boy and the boy's name was James. There was Betty in that family.

Billings: Guy, lived up on Oak Street. And then there was another brother that lived down the street a block or so, and to my knowledge he never married, and that was J.L. Nash.

J.L., and he wasn't married and he and his sister lived in a little brick house, on Third Street. It's been re...

South, south of the museum.

Dave: On which side of the road?

Billings: The west side of the road.

That house that Dick Weymouth lives in now was a Nash home.

Dave: Of J.L. and his sister?

Dave: I don't know who J.L. is.

Billings: Well, he was a little old man. You know the funniest thing about those people? They were into all kinds of things, but they did such menial things, I thought. In growing up and developing the community, and everything else. And they didn't think, and now J.L. Nash, and I knew most all these people as old people already, because they were that far advanced. He worked on the section, on the railroad, way back in his beginning. That didn't seem to bother them, or anything of the kind; there was no high standing with any of the family or anything like that. They didn't allude to be big shots, or, they did whatever was necessary to earn a keep and a living and that's it. And of course, they were, I always felt they were all for community improvements and development.

Dave: Where does Larry Nash, the lawyer fit in?

Billings: Well, he belonged to Neil in Port Edwards.

Billings: Why, Guy Nash was, lived in that big home, and they were into...

Dave: On Oak Street.

Billings: Yeah. They were into lumbering way back in the early years. And Guy Nash is one of the fellows, you've seen the book that's been around the museum, partially written or planned by Herb Bunde, and it's about Shanagolden. You recall what I'm talking about? Guy Nash was a part of what was going on at Shanagolden. He was the Nash interest in owning that timberland up there.

Dave: Yeah, he was the son of Tom, T.E. Nash.

Billings: Yes, yes.

Dave: How did you know him in Rapids, Guy Nash?

Billings: Guy Nash? Well, they were into a lot of things, civic-wise, they were people that improved the community, and were working for betterment, always. And, then, of course, he acquired the cranberry marsh at Biron, the one that you run right into when you're coming right into the village of Biron, into Biron proper. There's a big marsh right there, next to the road. That was the Guy Nash Marsh. Later years, his son, Philleo, was involved there. There was another son, Tom, an older brother of Philleo's, who was killed in an airplane accident.

Dave: Did you know him?

Billings: I just saw him.

Dave: You had seen him in your lifetime?

Billings: Yeah, but I knew Philleo because he was about my age. In fact, I think he was born in the same year that I was. And, then I was real well acquainted with his sister, Jean. And she was a nice, nice person.

Dave: How did you know her?

Billings: Well, just you see, I was in the public eye all the time, anyway. First, the post office put me there. See we're talking about when I went to work at the post office, of a population of about 8,000. And, so it was not difficult for me to learn countless names of people in the community, and...

Dave: And a lot of them came into the post office.

Billings: Yeah, and not only that, but you see, I was a carrier first, before I was a clerk inside the post office. And, one of the things I would be told that I had to do was, I was substitute, that was my term, substitute letter carrier, and anybody that was sick or vacationing or anything of the kind, I was told to take his route, so I carried every route in the city, at one time or another.

Dave: So you knew the city, then. I have some other questions on that story.

Billings: So, it was easy for me to know about these people. But some things, now for instance, I knew about the men, principally, and the women were housewives those days, and you never saw them. And, unless, they were wealthy enough to belong to some civic group, like the ladies' society, or something like that, you never knew who they were.

Dave: Was that true of Guy Nash's wife, too?

Billings: Guy Nash's wife was more community-minded.

Dave: Did you ever see her?

Billings: I saw her many times. The reason I say that to you was that she belonged to the same church that I belonged to, and she was the organist in the church. I was young enough, so that, we, careful what you write now on these things, she had a lot of action to her organ-playing. When she would sit on that bench, she'd be all over the bench, you know, playing away. It amused us, young blades, you know. We were looking for stuff like that. She was a brilliant pianist, or organist, and we just were kids, that's all.

Dave: What was her appearance? What did she look like?

Billings: Oh, nice-looking woman. She was a Philleo. And you know when you start talking about Philleos, what it does with our history. Mrs. Guy Nash was a Philleo girl. That's where Philleo Nash got his name from. See, these things all...

Dave: They all make sense.

Billings: They all finally fall into the pattern, cause when you only have that small population at first, they were all intermarried in some fashion, and that's what it was all about.

Dave: Did Guy Nash go to church? Did he attend church?

Billings: Yes, very much so. And Guy Nash was prominent in his earliest years that I knew of him. He came back from a meeting that he was to in New York City with the Boy Scout movement. He had heard of the man that founded Boy Scouts.

Dave: Lord Baden-Powell.

Billings: Right. He heard a speech by him and he brought that back to Wisconsin Rapids and introduced it into our city. And we ended up with a Boy Scout troop.

Dave: At the Congregational Church.

Billings: At the Congregational Church and by Guy Nash.

Dave: Were you in that troop?

Billings: Not yet, I was a little too young for that first gathering. But then I got into Scouting in a big way, afterwards. See, when my son got old enough, like what was the age that they took them in, like eight or something like that, then he could be a Cub Scout, I guess they called it. Then, my wife, who was willing to be a part of anything like that, she became a den mother. And so, we had Scouts running out of our ears, around the house, and having meetings there, and all the rest. And, then of course, I went on from there, and got into a higher level of Scouting, and so I was involved in Scouting for about ten years.

Dave: Was Stanton Mead involved at that time?

Billings: Yes. At a higher level yet. He was at the head of it, at Wausau. I forget the terms they use for that...

Dave: Was Guy Nash still involved when you were?

Billings: No, by the time I got there, he was out of it. He still would be a part of when something happened that called for outstanding individuals in Scouting, why he might come forth for something like that, but not to be actively with a troop or things of that sort.

Dave: Did you ever go to his house?

Billings: Yes. See, part of my early introduction into the post office was if for a period of about, oh, let me think how long, about four or five years, I was the parcel post carrier. And that was, we were the only delivery agency in town. There was nothing with this brown truck and any of that kind of stuff around here. It was all parcel post, all through the post office. And, so, I would be on that truck, every day and delivering parcel post every day for the whole city.

Dave: So you got into all the neighborhoods?

Billings: Every neighborhood in the city I was in. And, of course, the common thing was, you knocked on the door, which we were instructed to do, and wait for the person to come to the door and hand them the parcel. And, I've, maybe thousands of times, I've knocked on the door and the person would say come on in, you know, and you would step inside of the house and the woman would be up to her arms in soap suds or something like that, and so you'd have a little exchange about how are you today and this, that, and the other thing. You never gave it a thought, it was just part of the job. And, I saw practically all the housewives in town at one time or another. And, then, of course, at Christmas time, I don't think we missed a soul at Christmas time. They all got something.

Dave: What was notable about the Nash house? The housewife would have been Mrs. Nash.

Billings: The only thing that was maybe notable was the upstairs windows to the east; there was like a platform there, and there was, it was screened in, and there was a bed out there, and Jean Nash was in the beginning of a tubercular thing, and she used to sleep out there, and it looked kind of funny to us to see somebody suspended in their bed out over the lawn.

Dave: Would have been in cold weather.

Billings: Real cold, yes, but she was, she had a heart attack. I think this happened at Bull's Eye Country Club, she died there, and she wasn't that old a girl, at the time of her death. But I thought a lot of Jean, I thought she was an awful nice person. And never married.

Dave: Did she ever have a boyfriend?

Billings: Not to my knowledge, unless they would

be kind of loose ones, you know, that weren't really boyfriend of a serious nature, they were just somebody you went to the dance with for this occasion, and that would be it.

Dave: Did she go to school with you?

Billings: She was in school when I was in school. And she also went away to some part of her schooling, I can't separate it for you.

Dave: Philleo also, did he go to school...

Billings: I remember Philleo well when I started at school in town here. I started in the fifth grade at the Howe School and when I went there Philleo was in Howe School

Dave: What grade was he in?

Billings: I think in the same grade, the way I remember it.

Dave: As a youngster, did he make an impression?

Billings: Yes. He was musical and that was kind of unusual for a youngster in grade school to be playing a violin. Of course, the mother was musical, very much so, and I suppose that was where the encouragement came from. Philleo was very musical and won awards as he went through high school for his music, for his talent.

Dave: By playing what instrument?

Billings: Violin. And I can remember being in class plays at the old Howe school. Do you know [what I mean] when I tell you about the picture of the old stone school? On either end of it was a fire escape, and it was just stone steps, and you went out the door and you went into a closed set of steps going down to the ground. We used to change our clothes out there for the class play. We'd go out on the first escape, on the steps in there, and I can remember one in particular that Philleo was in and so was I. The name of the

play was "The Birds of Killingworth," and that's all I know about it. But, no, he was very intelligent.

Dave: Likeable? Or was he arrogant?

Billings: Yes, he was a friendly kid. No, he wasn't arrogant, or anything like that. Didn't show any differences in how he would act around us fellows.

Dave: Because his Dad was on the school board and everything.

Billings: That was part of the deal, too, that Mr. Nash was involved in all of the things of that nature, too, he'd be on the school board. I don't think...

Dave: Sports or anything like that, Philleo? Did he ever? Was he at all an athlete or anything?



Billings: No, he was strictly musical. I don't think he was ever encouraged. Like, my father thought I should play football, and that's the difference in how these people reacted and I don't think Philleo ever was encouraged to be a part of anything like that.

Dave: [With camera]. This is one of those digital ones, I can take all the pictures I want.

Billings: You can?

Dave: There's no film, it all goes on a computer storage.

Billings: For goodness sakes.

Dave: Here's that picture I just took. I'll put it back on.

Billings: Well, for goodness sakes.

Dave: That's the way they do it nowadays.

Billings: Gosh. That'll set you back a penny or two.

Dave: Any other Nashes that come to mind?

Billings: There were other Nashes and I wish I could separate them for you. There was a Nash family on Fourth Avenue North. And the name was Frank Nash. And they had one daughter, Caroline. And, Caroline, I would think you might have brushed somewhere along the line. She was married to George Frechette.

Dave: Oh, yeah, I did "brush" her. I talked to her after George was dead.

Billings: So that's that family. That's a separate family. Now he was a janitor in the school system here in town. So, you see, they weren't pretentious in any way, shape or manner.

Dave: Maybe there's a Mike Nash that was a fireman, maybe that's his family. He's a west-sider.

Billings: I think another old Nash that could have been a brother to this Frank. And then he had a whole raft of kids. And they were names, can you remember names like Dobber Nash that ran the tavern?

Dave: Yes. Dobber.

Billings: And there was Ed, and there was Joe and there was Ray and then there was...

Dave: Was there a Bud Nash?

Billings: Ray was Bud.

Dave: But you don't know how that bunch is related to the other bunch?

Billings: I think they were related to the Frank Nash family, Caroline's folks.

Dave: That's way back, do you think they all had the same ancestor?

Billings: I think if you had the means to do it, you could go back in that Nash family and find them all kind of gathered together, because they all came down this country through Rudolph, they came from Canada, all those Irish came from Canada years ago. I used to hear

this all from my father-in-law. And he was one of the same, you know, way back when. And his father came from Canada when my father-in-law was like three years old, or something like that.

Dave: I know what you mean about Canada.

Billings: Yeah. And they migrated to the area around Rudolph. And they worked there, they farmed and did all kinds of things like that. And then they slowly gathered together and kind of moved on into the Wisconsin Rapids area, because there was more work, and I suppose, better returns for them.

Dave: Well, there's a Nash road, what Nash is that?

Billings: I think that it could have been the Rudolph-area people. But, that was, then there was, that family was a big family. I named off four or five of them there, but, then there was girls, several girls in that family, too, besides those boys that I named. I think their father's name was Will. I think William Nash. He lived on Fremont Street

Dave: But we're just not positive that they're all related?

Billings: I think that if you went far enough back, you'd get a connection. They're all good Irish, Irish Catholics.

### Third Street

Dave: Another subject for you. Because of the parcel post, you were saying, you went to every part of the town.

Billings: Every part of the city. And I had a regular-assigned route that we did, while we did this. I would start out in the morning with my truck. I'd go first off to Consolidated and Johnson & Hills, because they were the biggest mail-getters in town, and I wanted to get their mail and parcels delivered and out of the way. So I would go there when I went to work in the morning, at seven or seven-thirty somewhere along in that. Now there's no longer any of that early stuff goes with the post office, it's nine and ten o'clock now. And, I would go to Johnson Hills and unload all the Johnson Hills stuff, and then I'd go to Consolidated and unload theirs on the platform, and then I'd go back to the post office, cause see, my truck had been pretty near full. And I'd go back to the post office and load it up again, and then, those days, all of the letter carriers that worked and delivered around town used to have what we called relay boxes around the city.

Can you remember seeing big steel boxes? Well, those were called relay boxes and the object was that after they had the mail prepared, ready to deliver, they would give it to me and I would take it out and put in those boxes, those deposit boxes, and so that took me an hour, hour-and-a-half in the morning, just to get the mail to the different carriers around the city. Then I'd



go back to the post office, and start in again to deliver and, I usually delivered the west side of the river first, that would mean north and south of Grand Avenue. I think I delivered out as far as Sixteenth or Seventeenth Avenue.

Then, I'd go back to the post office and load up again. And these were big loads of parcel post. Then I'd go east of the city. And then I'd go around by the schools and all that sort of thing. And then I'd come back and by that time, I was pretty near cleaned up with my parcel post, and then I'd do Third Street, which was just a small amount, in comparison to the rest of the city. And, that was just the... where the hospital has now taken over.

They got the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. And, of course, they would be waiting for it. I would have like 100 *Chicago Daily Tribunes* that I would deliver, when I was on that particular route.

Dave: That's a good one, because what I wanted to ask you about is, tell me about all of the neighborhoods of the town. The town has neighborhoods?

Billings: Yes.

Dave: And one of them would be Third Street?

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: And one of the weird things about Third Street is they all got the *Chicago Tribune*.

Billings: And, see, it had the current stock market...

Dave: That's the reason.

Billings: That's the reason. And those old timers, that were retired like, old R[?] Garrison, and those kind of people, they'd be on the porch waiting for you to come.

Dave: To see how their stocks were doing.

Billings: Right, right. And see, they had originally all invested in places like Consolidated and Nekoosa-Edwards and all those sorts of places, so they were anxious to get the *Chicago Tribune* in their hands.

Dave: What about any other neighborhood that got the *Chicago Tribune*?

Billings: No, nothing like that.

Dave: So, that really showed what it was like.

Billings: Yes. Definitely, and that area ran, well...

Dave: Tell me the limits of that neighborhood.

Billings: That neighborhood was all from the river, east to about Lincoln Street. If you can get the picture, from the river up to Lincoln Street. And then, down to the railroad tracks, which is now the expressway. And then over to about, Witter Street around, kind of...

Dave: So, it wasn't just Third Street? It was the whole...

Billings: It was that whole corner. And...

Dave: Third Street was what we always called it though...

Billings: Well, yeah, Third Street would go, all that counted. That was where the people made the difference. But, and they were all nice people, they were wonderful. That letter carrier that had that route, he wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. When they were like adjusting routes, or anything like that, and they'd ask anybody want a different route while we're doing this? And, never, would he ever want to exchange any part of his route.

Dave: Did they tip at Christmas?

Billings: Oh, that was half the story. And they all got

*Life* magazine, of course, when it was published. Every one of them. They all had money invested in the Consolidated. And, so, they all wanted anything they could do to benefit themselves. And, so, anyway, when you got that route on, I think that it came out on a Thursday. And when you got that route, why you had your work cut out for you because they were, those were heavy son-of-a-guns.

Dave: So they got *Life* magazine, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and what else did they get that nobody else got? Did they get *National Geographic* and...

Billings: Yes, they got...but not to the amount that *Life* did and anything like that. You were more apt to have had magazines like we'll say, *Collier's* and *Saturday Evening Post*. Those were both good reading magazines. And, so then that was a little different.

Dave: What's another neighborhood of the town?

### Bloody First

Billings: Well, of course, we used to always refer to the Green Bay & Western, and that was the area all around St. Peter & Paul church.

Dave: What did you call that?

Billings: Well...

Dave: Besides the Bloody Third?

Billings: Bloody First.

Dave: Oh, the Bloody First.

Billings: That was the first war. My father-in-law was the alderman. And, my wife's grandfather built the Love house. Do you know when we talk about the Love house?

Dave: Sure do.

Billings: And he built that and operated it for about thirty years. And, then, they even named the street that's right next to it, that's Love Street.

Dave: So, the name of that neighborhood would be what?

Billings: Well, we all usually just say the Bloody First.

Dave: And what's the characteristic of that neighborhood?

Billings: Well, it was all railroad people, that was a different breed of people. And, of course, you had to kind of get used to the noise and the banging and all the rest of the, see, there was trains that would switch and operate all night long.

Dave: That's a good point.

Billings: And you got so that you got used to that and then if you didn't have that racket, you couldn't sleep. We'd just go to bed and never even think about of it, and the trains would be bumping into cars and switching, and, you know, in the night.

Dave: From the point of view of a mailman, what would that neighborhood be like?

Billings: Well, they weren't big mail-getters.

They were people that just traveled and went the

way the railroad went, and that's kind of the whole story as far as that's concerned.

**The Irving School Gang**

Billings: There was an area that we used to shy away from, and it was the area around the Irving School.

Dave: Yeah, because of the cemetery or what?

Billings: Yeah. And, we were kind of, as kids, we were all kind of afraid of them. They were some older kids that were kind of behind in school, so they were bigger than we were but in the same grade, and so we [kept our] hands off of them I tell you and stayed on our side of the sidewalk.

Dave: Was there a name for that neighborhood?

Billings: Just the Irving School gang, yeah, that was it. You had to go up a hill there to...

Dave: Are you still afraid of some of them or can you name them?

Billings: There was like the Gray brothers and the Ryans and all names like that, that all lived up there. They stayed in their own territory, but...

Dave: They didn't come after you, but then you didn't want to go in theirs.

Billings: We didn't go in the neighborhood, we stayed away. And then there was a bunch over around old Lincoln high school, all around the fair grounds, you know the Witter Field?

Dave: Yeah, south of the high school there?

Billings: Yeah, and that was a whole set that lived in that neighborhood over there. There was Harold [Knoll?] and the Klappa boys and we shied away from them in the same fashion. See, I lived by the Green Bay tracks and I went to the Howe School, well, you see I had to go, run the gamut all the way up to get up to the Howe School, and I was literally around that group I just told you about. They all came to St. Peter & Paul and so they would come down, there must have been about four, at least four Klappa brothers and they had twin sisters and they would all be coming to St. Peter & Paul. And we would go on one side of the street and they'd go on the other; there was too many of them for us. And I only had from my neighborhood, going to the Howe School, there was only about three of us, so we were a little cautious of how far we extended our travel.

Dave: So, when you were a kid, you were very aware of that?

Billings: Oh, yeah, that was big. You didn't call them gangs then, no, bunch, bunch of kids.

Dave: As a postal delivery person, were you aware of other neighborhoods in the town?

Billings: No, none of that affected me.

Dave: What about Sand Hill?

Billings: I separated those people for delivery of parcel post. And I did that in that fashion that you're, I think, getting at. I had a route that I would go out and do Third Street and that would be that whole area that

I told you about. And then I'd move over and the next one I'd get was called south of Oak Street. And it'd be all the homes south of Oak Street, and from about Lincoln Street where Third Street group ended, out to about Twelfth or Thirteenth Street, then I had north of, each time I'd go back to the post office, and load my truck up again. That's how much stuff we had.

Dave: What about Sand Hill? Did you deliver up there?

Billings: No, those were on rural routes at that time.

Dave: That was a neighborhood, though, right?

Billings: Yeah, it was a little different than what we call our neighborhood. There was some, you know there was some taverns out in there, and we were kind of leery about getting too far a field there. I can remember of going off in that direction out around by the airport, I think it would be in the spring of the year, maybe for a school class. The teacher would tell you to go and look for some wildflowers that might be coming out now and we maybe get as far away as the airport, looking. And, or take little hikes by a certain teacher, but I wasn't too long, you see I started in the fifth grade at Howe school, and then I went to fifth and sixth grade there, fifth, sixth and seventh, at Howe. And then eighth grade, I went to the Lincoln building, the old Lincoln building. And, that was the only grade of grade school that was in that building. We were down on the lower level.

**Hornigold**

Dave: You said as a Lincoln student, you used to go fishing with Duke?

Billings: Oh yeah.

Dave: Hornigold.

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: Tell me about that.

Billings: Well, of course, he was into all those sort of thing. He was an outdoor fellow. He liked the outdoors, and of course, he was, that was his field, you see, it was all these things pertaining to wildlife and all that sort of thing. And we would, there was a kid that chummed with me and his name was Frank Lindeman?. And, he talked Duke into, he said we've got a good place to fish trout. Duke wanted to know where it was and we told him it was over near Scandinavia. I think that maybe it was Frankie's dad that took us over there.

Anyway, we drove over to Scandinavia and fished in the stream, and it's still there and it's still a good trout stream, it's part of the Tomorrow River chain, sort of. And the only thing I remember about it was that we got out of the car, and of course, we decided, there was four of us, there was two high school teachers and us two kids. And we walked from, oh, from here to Eighth Street, down along the creek bank, and we were talking, you know how kids are, and the teachers answering questions and all that kind of stuff, and then we got over next to the creek, and it was all over-grown with brush,

and you had to find spots to drop your bait in. We got close enough so we could see, you know, what you were doing, and here was a snake hanging in the trees, right above the water, so we went a little farther, a few feet, here was another one hanging in the brush, and I don't think I ever saw so many snakes in all my born day. And they were both, kind of a black water snake, pretty fair size snake. We then we used to refer to them as pine snakes.

Dave: Yeah, I've heard of pine snakes.

Billings: Yeah, and they were there, and they were everywhere we put our foot down. I never saw so many in all my born days.

Dave: What did Duke think of that?

Billings: Well, he wanted to play with them with his pole, you know, he would tease them, you know, annoy them. He thought that was great sport. Of course, we had hip-boots on and I don't think that anything was going to hurt us, but the fact that they were hanging this high in the air, you know, really turned us off.

Dave: Did Duke ever talk about his life?

Billings: No.

Dave: He didn't tell where he came from?

Billings: No. Not to me. And that could have been something he did to other people. He was here a long time, you know.

Dave: He had a funny way of talking, didn't he?

Billings: Oh, gosh, the kids, they said they couldn't understand him.

Dave: Yeah, what was that, an accent, right? English?

Billings: English, English, oh, by all means. And, did you have him?

Dave: No. I didn't take that course. Chemistry, I think, was his course.

Billings: Well, he had about three different courses.

Dave: Chemistry and Biology.

Billings: Yeah. At least three that he had, I can't recall them now for you, but it was, I know, it was Science. I think it was General Science.

Dave: You got along with him, you thought he was a personable...

Billings: Oh, very much so. We stayed good friends until his death. And, of course, he belonged to my church, so I saw him. He always sang, you know he was a good singer.

Dave: I'd heard that.

Billings: And, so, whenever there was anything to do with music, why, he always sang in our church choir. Not, Lil, she was more boy than Duke was, but they were great, nice people.

Dave: Did you work with her at the post office?

Billings: Yeah, I worked with her.

Dave: How did that go?

Billings: Well, I didn't have any problems with her at all. She was very nice.

Dave: Did she have an office there?

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: She was the draft board. She didn't work for the post office, did she?

Billings: No.

Dave: She was important to a lot of us, though.

Billings: Oh, indeed, oh indeed. But, I also had another brush with her, not disfavorable. Paul Reisbeck, running Church's Drugstore, when he got in there, the first thing that he wanted to do was have a postal station, which he got.

### **Church's**

He ran it for just a little while and then he hired Lil and she ran it for awhile. And then one day he called me or some way and he said, he wanted to know if I was free on a given Saturday, whatever it was, and he said I'd like to have you come and stop in. I did. I stopped in to visit him.

He got me in the back room and he said, we aren't balancing out at the end of the day, he said and I don't think anybody is cheating or anything of the kind, it's just that they aren't figuring it right. And he said, how about you coming and checking it. Well, I said, sure I'll come and check it for you.

So I went over there and checked the whole thing out. So then he asked me the next month to come around and do it over again, and I did. And, so that led to why don't you do it every month. And I said, well, I guess I could do that, too. So, then I would go there at the end of the month to send in the totals to the regular post office.

Finally, he said to me, how would you like to help me out with some other stuff? I said, well, I had gotten to know Paul pretty well by that time. See, his boys weren't around then. Jack was still in high school and Paul, the older boy, was in the Navy. And, he said I'd like to have somebody that I can trust and that knows what this is all about. That led to me starting to help him out in the store. And I got so that I was there as much as I was carrying mail. I'd go there right from work, I'd get through work about four o'clock in the afternoon....

Dave: That's the old Church's Drugstore you're talking about?

Billings: Yes. And, like I said, his two sons that ran it while you knew it, they were out of the picture then. And, I said well, I don't know, I maybe did this for five,



six, seven years.

Dave: What was going on at Church's Drugstore in those days?

Billings: That was an interesting place.

Dave: When was that, in the 50s, or?

Billings: Yeah, well, I quit in 51.

Dave: So, the 40s.

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: What was going on there?

Billings: Well, we had a lot of activity. Every morning when we'd gather at Church's Drugstore, before the store was actually going, there were all these businessmen around town would all gather and there was a back room at Church's Drugstore. It was half again bigger than this room. And it had in there the information about prescriptions and all that kind of stuff and some excess medicines and all kinds of storage room. And these old guys would gather there in the morning and all they would do is BS each other for about twenty minutes every morning. And there was old dentists and old doctors.

Dave: Who were some of those, do you remember, their names?

Billings: Oh, sure, there was old Doc Clark was one, Doctor V[an?], those were dentists. And Dr. Oakes. Those were all dentists. Oh, Dr. Ball, Dr. what was his name, there was a Dr. Johnson.

Dave: So they were all getting together. Any bankers going there?

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: Bankers too?

Billings: There were just businessmen from, yes, I'd seen the bankers there. John [?] used to come there and some of the rest and they would be all full of [?] every morning before they launch off and did their job.

Dave: They were drinking coffee, I suppose?

Billings: Yeah, yeah, anything like that. And then filling each other full of hot air, you know. They'd make fun of Doc Clark, he was an old man, about eighty, eighty-five years old, I guess. He was supposed to take care of his health and he'd have both pockets of his coat filled full of peanuts. And he said the doctor says I'm not supposed to eat peanuts, but he said, I don't tell him I'm eating them. He'd come there in the morning with that whole array of peanuts and he'd eat before he went to work.

Dave: You had the First National Bank across the street.

Billings: Yep. First National Bank.

Dave: Did you ever have occasion to go there?

Billings: Oh, yes, sure, I've been in that. When we first came to town, my family, the First National Bank was on the east side of the river, and we went there because it was closer to where we lived. It wasn't until, well, I think my dad stayed with it until he died. But I didn't. After I built my home in 1940, I went to the Wood County Bank because it was close to my

home and everything. Save me some, see, those were depression years, serious depression years, and I didn't have any money, didn't have any sight of getting any, and, I just, anything that I could do to improve my standing, I was all for it, so I was looking for something to keep me afloat.

### **Banana Band**

Dave: Now these guys who were in the back of that store. If you continued around the town in the 40's or, so would you run into any characters or strange persons here?

Billings: Oh, yeah.

Dave: Who were the town characters?

Billings: And they were good-timers. And they were looking for a reason to go out and whoop it up every time they had a chance. And then what started the whole thing and triggered everything was, then they got that drum corps going here in town, and that was a wonderful layout that they finally came up with. They had a beautiful drum corps here, that group of World War I people. And, they had pretty outfits, pretty uniforms. Funny, you haven't, you should have...

Dave: You called it a drum and bugle corps? Rather than a band?

Billings: This is Drum and Bugle Corps.

Billings: But, they, I've seen more than one picture of it. A couple of pictures I saw they were all standing on the bridge and it made a beautiful shot, you know of, them standing there.

Dave: People were kind of light-hearted sometimes?

Billings: They raised hell, they were something else again. Maybe this World War I group, you remember hearing about the Banana Band?

Dave: Yeah.

Billings: Well, that's these same guys that were in that bunch, Goggins and ...

Dave: How about F.X. Pomainville?

Billings: F.X. Pomainville. And, God, he was in his eighties then when he was doing all this.

Dave: The Banana Band, yeah.

Billings: And, F.X. Pomainville, they would be on a truck, on a flat bed truck, this orchestra. They had about eight pieces. And F.X. Pomainville was the leader. And all the while the truck was going down the road, he was dancing on the flat bed, kicking his feet way up, you know. Why, I'd fall over on my head if I tried to do a stunt like that, but not him. He was a character, F.X. Always bumming cigarettes, he never had cigarettes.

He would be mostly in Daly's Drugstore.

Dave: Another hangout for the...?

Billings: For doctors. On the east side. But, especially F.X. He'd come in to look for somebody to bum a cigarette from. And, of course, I always felt sorry for him because he had a no-good son. And, I think that son committed suicide. Young man, young doctor.

**Moonshine**

Billings: You used to see drunks, typical drunks. They were drunk every time they got their hands on money. And then, during the prohibition days, that was really something.

Dave: What was that like?

Billings: Well, I mean, sneaking booze to people and finding places that you can buy. The Golden Eagle Tavern, out on 54, had the reputation for the best whiskey that anybody had around here. And he had an uncle, I think it was, was it his uncle or what, that had a farm across the road from the Golden Eagle, and he made the whiskey. Joe Goodwin, who ran the Golden Eagle, whenever he'd run across the road and get another bottle and they kept that so they didn't have a bunch of stuff to dispose of, you know, if the feds broke in, and that's how they operated. Old Jake Lutz, who lived out there, he made the booze and Joe Goodwin sold it. But, we, of course, I'm, suppose, about twenty years old at that time, somewhere along in there, we were looking for, like, if you were going [out on] New Year's Eve and you wanted a bottle to take along with you, we'd make arrangements with Joe Goodwin to buy a bottle of Jake Lutz's whiskey.

Dave: Ahead of time, you'd reserve it.

Billings: Yeah, yeah.

Dave: Then how did you go get it? Did you just drive out to the Golden Eagle?

Billings: Yeah. See, he had a place he had like a little stand, a separate stand that he sold...

Dave: That barbeque stand.

Billings: You remember that?

Dave: Yeah.

Billings: Well, anyway, then, if you went to that, why they knew.

Mrs. Goodwin ran the barbeque stand, his wife.

Dave: Yeah, they did sell barbeques? Or liquor?

Billings: No, just barbeques, out there at that...

Dave: Where were you picking up your bottle?

Billings: From, she, we'd call her, yeah, so we'd be all ready for it when we'd come there.

Dave: If you wanted to sit in the bar, could you get liquor?

Billings: No, you couldn't get liquor anywhere, like just to go and buy it.

Dave: Why did they even keep the bars open, what did they do?

Billings: Well, they all did it on the sly, and God, some of that was awful whiskey. Holy Moses! There used to be a guy named Henry, Harry Patrick. He provided whiskey whenever there was a dance or anything at the Armory. He would be parked out in front somewhere there and everybody knew his car and then he'd sell you a bottle for two dollars. So, you'd buy it, and it looked like as though it was made yesterday.

Dave: Tasted that way. Keep going on places that sold liquor during prohibition, that's interesting. Ever get up

on Sand Hill?

Billings: Joe Narel, he had a reputation, too. He had a good reputation. And a lot of the guys, like he was a serviceman from World War I, and a good one, a good backer and everything else, so a lot of those kind of fellas went to Joe and bought booze and he could get it for them.

Dave: Did he run a bar or did he just run a...

Billings: He had a bar. It looked like a house, but it was a bar. And...

Dave: Was there anything downtown?

Billings: All of the businesses were open and operating. The only thing was, a few of them had 2% beer and, I think that's what it was called, 2%, 3%, 2%, I think it was called, alcohol.

Dave: Or was it 3.2%.

Billings: Maybe that's it.

Dave: 3.2 beer.

Billings: 3.2. That sounds more familiar. I never drank it so I don't know.

Dave: Like if you went to the Witter Hotel, could you get a drink?

Billings: I don't think so. And this Bing Goggins I told you about, he saw to it that everything was on the up and up. Not for him, but for everybody else. His wife used to tell, and I guess it was commonly known, that he'd get on a binge, you know, and she must have known how to tell and he'd get wanting to drink and she told somebody that she'd buy half a case of whiskey and put him in his room at home and put the whiskey in there and lock the door, just let him wallow in it.

...

Dave: How about up towards Rudolph, was there any place to get liquor north of town there?

Billings: I don't know of any.

Dave: Did you ever go out to that Molepske's dance hall?

Billings: Yes, but for some reason or another I wasn't into too much at that stage. We could go across the street from where I lived at that time up on First Street. The Love house by that time was a tavern and we could get stuff over there. My dad, of course, knew the owner of the Love house.

Dave: You didn't have to go that far to get something to drink.

Billings: No, and, not only that, but the house next to our house, behind us, was the nephew of the guy that made whiskey out there on highway 54, the Lutz family. This was a Lutz.

Dave: They used to have the brewery, so they were used to making it.

Billings: Yeah, they were all tied in. And this fellow knew how to make whiskey. And he would make it and he would give my dad a bottle. And my dad said it was real good.

Dave: You probably had more whiskey then than you ever had.

Billings: Right, just because you weren't supposed to have it. That's what that was all about.

Dave: How about Moccasin Creek, did anybody drink out there?

Billings: I don't think so. I wasn't there many times, but I was there on a few occasions. And, course, I rode out on the street car.

Dave: How about at the Elks Club?

Billings: I had nothing to do with the Elks. I wasn't a member or anything of the kind. But, like on New Years, of course, we got a bottle and we bought ours from Joe Goodwin at the place out there.

**The Sunrise**

Dave: The Sunrise Tavern, you know that one?

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: Do you know anything about a killing that took place there once?

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: What's the story of that?

Billings: Well, that was Frank Pepper. We knew Frank real well. We liked Frank.

Dave: He was the owner of the bar.

Billings: That's where the street is named after, that we're living on right here. He was a bootlegger that came up from Chicago and he bought that old brick building there.

Dave: What was it before?

Billings: I think a residence.

Dave: Looks like a house.

Billings: And this Frank came up, from Chicago. I think he got chased out of Chicago maybe by the hoods and he started up this tavern in this place, and believe it or not, but those days, you used to go to the tavern and you'd get a glass of 3.2 beer, or whatever that was and they'd serve you a whole meal.

Dave: With the beer?

Billings: For free. And we used to take my mother to Frank Pepper's because it was such a nice place, so clean and good food. My mother used to ask Frank, we got to know him well enough, so that we'd go out, if I wasn't working, we'd go out in the afternoon and visit with him, and...

Pretty near always chicken, chicken meal but it'd be a regular chicken dinner. And nothing, you know, held back on it at all.

Billings: But it was a good meal, Rollie Radloff always served a good meal at his place, too.

**Rollie's**

Dave: At Rollie's Bar downtown?

Billings: Not the one down in the basement.

Dave: No, where's that?

Billings: The one upstairs.

Dave: Same building?

Billings: Same building.

Dave: Rollie Radloff?.

Billings: He had the room closest to the river.

Dave: For his bar?

Billings: Yes. Where his bar was in. It was, there was two or three or four fronts along that block.

Billings: Yes. Anyway, he had the last place next to the river, on the south side of the street. Like the Elks Club, you were kind of hanging over the water. And, of course, we were personal friends of Rollie's. At that time, I used to have to work for a while after supper every night at the post office.

Dave: Go back in and work?

Billings: Yeah. And, of course...

Dave: That's only a block away from Rollie's?

Billings: That's right. And at that time I was married. And we were very close friends for years with Ray Burchell.

Dave: Oh yeah.

Billings: And, we would gather at Rollie's after I got through work. I got through about eight o'clock, eight-thirty, somewhere along in there. See, our son wasn't born yet. We were married but we didn't have any family. Ray would pick up my wife and his lady friend and then they'd go to Rollie's and wait for me to get through work and I'd walk over there. We'd sit at the end of the bar. Rollie's first wife was alive then and we knew her too, real well. And then we'd sit and visit all evening, like we're doing, just sitting, having fun. And once in a while have a beer, but then he would serve a meal to people in the back. He had a room that he'd serve food in. It was about half the size of the bar room, I guess, pretty good size, and we would also go and pick up my mother, and take her there the same way that we did with Pepper, because there was never profanity in Rollie's place or anything of the kind like that, nothing out of order there, ever. He ran the cleanest place in this whole town. And, so we never felt bad, my mother knew Rollie real well, he knew her.

Dave: Where did he come from?

Billings: He came from a little town called, well, just out of Oneida.

Dave: Over by Seymour there? Oneida, Green Bay?

Billings: But one of the other little towns, like either Kaukauna or Little Chute, one of those. You know there's three or four of those little Oneida [like places], and those are all close together.

Dave: Kimberly.

Billings: Yeah, but I can't remember which one. But he came from one of those towns.

Dave: Radloff? It should be some nationality.

Billings: But, anyway, he came into Oneida, and went into partnership with a fellow that my dad knew. My father knew all those people along the railroad. He could go into any of the taverns and if he wanted a

drink he could get one, because they all knew him  
 Dave: Is that how Rollie got acquainted with the Rapids, through your dad?

Billings: Part of it, yeah. And so anyway, Rollie came to Oneida first and then partnered with a fellow there and afterwards decided that he didn't like being a partner, and he sold out and moved to Wisconsin Rapids and started up a tavern here. So we knew him before he came here.

Dave: About what year do you think he started that tavern?

Billings: Oh, let's see. I'd say about 1935.

Dave: Well, he probably started it at the end of prohibition.

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: What happened to him?

Billings: Rollie? He just died a normal death.

Dave: In Rapids?

Billings: Yeah.

Dave: Stayed here?

Billings: Yeah. He was in his nineties.

Dave: You never told me what happened to Frank Pepper.

Billings: Frank Pepper was shot by his wife. He came home unexpectedly, and she was in bed with somebody else.

Dave: Who was she in bed with, do you know?

Billings: Well, what was funny about it was that she shot him.

Dave: That's what I thought.

Billings: She was the one who was in bed with the guy. And her only out was that she took the gun and blasted her husband.

Dave: She got off.

Billings: She got off.

Dave: Who was the guy?

Billings: I don't know. If I knew at one time, but we used to go when his first, Pepper's wife, the one he brought up from Chicago, when she was there and in the tavern with him. We used to visit with them, too. We'd go out and spend an hour just sitting and visiting with them. And, Frank was quite a character, he was a typical Chicago gangster, that's what he was, but he was a good friend, a good guy. We didn't drink, it wasn't as though we went and drank all night or anything. God, we'd nurse a glass of beer for an hour or so. And, just visit. It's not like it is. There wasn't any TV or none of these kinds of things...

Dave: It was your social life. Was Johnnie's Bar there at that time? Do you remember when that went in?

Billings: Are you talking about on that 54?

Dave: On Eighth Street. Johnnie's Rapids Inn.

Billings: Oh, no, he wasn't there.

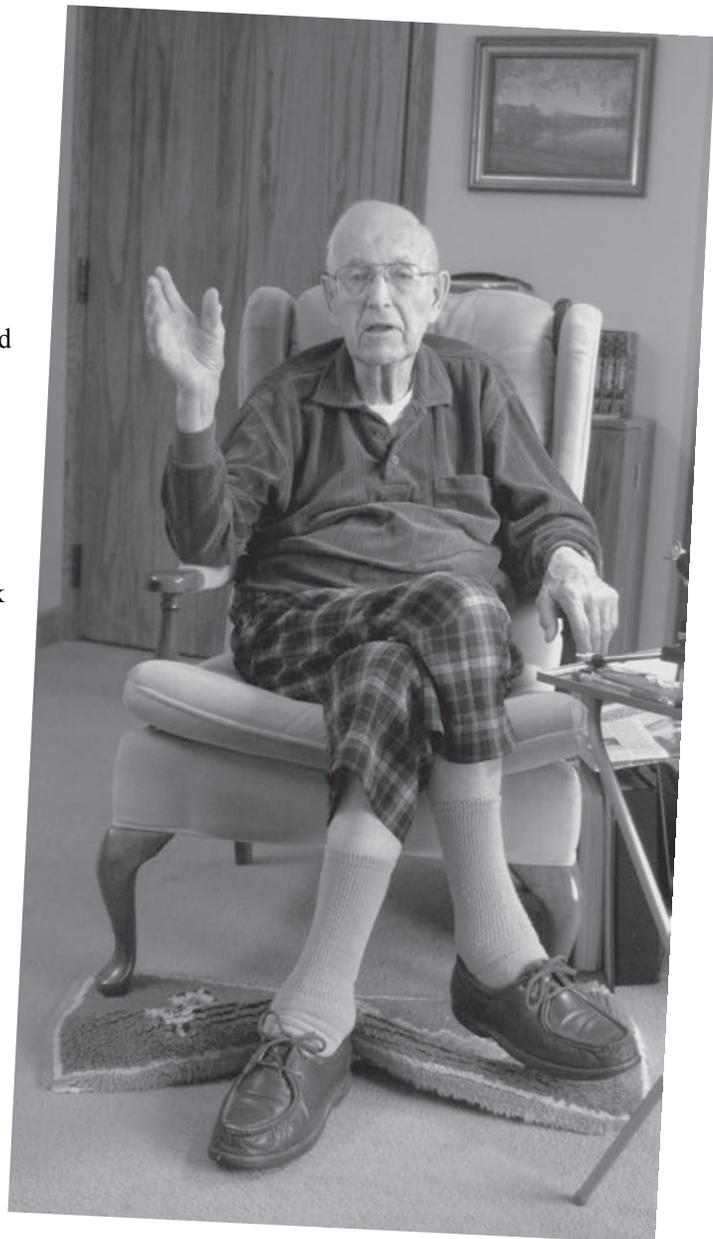
Dave: He wasn't there yet.

Billings: There was a place called Johnnie's was out on 54. Later it was called Jimmy's. You know what I'm talking about.

Dave: The Hawaiian... my tape's going to run out. I got to get my daughter in a couple minutes, so our time is up.

Billings: OK.

[See July 18 and subsequent *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribunes* for shorter stories derived from this interview.]



Photos by Dave Engel

### Artifacts Readers Write Back



Hi Dave,

Here’s a photo of the Sunrise Tavern as we drove past it on Hwy. 52 yesterday. Still doin’ business in the same old place. I used to enjoy stopping in the old rural “farmer” taverns in the old days. Nowadays they have the music (bad) turned up so loud you can’t hear yourself think. Am I getting old?

Regards, Dave [Patrykus]

*See May 2005 Artifacts for the chain of coincidences surrounding this Sunrise Tavern in Marathon County.*



May *Artifacts* photo identified: “Pick Six for Dairy Queen Semi-Finals” read the headline in the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, July 13, 1951. Left to right: Jerane Engum, Stevens Point; Ardelle Breu, Auburndale; Pat Hetzel, Plainfield; Rita Elsen, Nekoosa; Peggy Johnson, Coddington; and Virginia Beane, Berlin. The winners were announced at the Rapids White Sox-Oshkosh Giants game at Wisconsin Rapids. *Identified by Ardelle Brau Vandehey, Marshfield.*



Also from May *Artifacts*. Left to right: Ken Hill, Lanny Anderson (with Mohawk) and Lanny’s “kid sister,” Sandra Anderson Gallagher (kneeling). *Identified by Phil Brown and Ken Hill.*



Don Litzer, former Head of Adult Services, McMillan Memorial Library, on his last day here. A specialist in genealogy, he has moved on to Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

## History at McMillan

by Don Litzer

Head of Adult Services

McMillan Memorial Library

The latest installment of “History at McMillan” recounted the runs of several south Wood County, Wis., newspapers, namely the *Wood County Reporter* (published 1857-1923, extant 1858-1923), *Centralia Enterprise* (1879-1887), *Centralia Enterprise and Tribune* (1887-1900) and the *Grand Rapids Tribune* (1873-1887, 1900-1920).

One of the more circuitous newspaper threads was that of the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, which originated as the *Wisconsin Valley Leader*.

The *Wisconsin Valley Leader* began as a weekly newspaper in 1902 and was published as a weekly until at least February 1918. In 1914, a daily edition began, named the *Daily Leader*. William F. Huffman purchased the *Leader* in 1919 and, on Oct. 16, 1919, changed the name of the daily to the *Grand Rapids Leader*.

In 1920, Huffman purchased the weekly *Grand Rapids Tribune*, appropriated the name, and applied it to his daily paper. Therefore, on March 1, 1920, the daily *Grand Rapids Leader* became the *Grand Rapids Tribune*. Beginning with the March 22, 1920, edition, the daily’s banner title was the *Grand Rapids Daily Tribune*.

While this was happening, a debate was in process regarding the renaming of Grand Rapids, Wis., to eliminate confusion with the same-named city in Michigan. When the Wisconsin city changed its name to Wisconsin Rapids, the *Grand Rapids Daily Tribune* became the *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, beginning with the Aug. 5, 1920, edition.

To recap, a south Wood County resident subscribing to the daily paper would have been greeted by a succession of five different banner titles in a ten-month span:

-1914 to Nov. 15, 1919: *Daily Leader*

-Nov. 15, 1919, to Feb. 28, 1920: *Grand Rapids Leader*

-March 1, 1920, to March 20, 1920: *Grand Rapids Tribune*

-March 22, 1920, to Aug. 4, 1920: *Grand Rapids Daily Tribune*

-Aug. 5, 1920, to present: *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*

These changes made sense at the time, but they have since vexed historians and cataloging librarians!

While William F. Huffman appropriated the *Tribune* name for his *Daily Leader* after acquiring the weekly *Grand Rapids Tribune* in 1920, he continued to publish a weekly *Tribune*. This weekly edition is mentioned in the 1923 *History of Wood County* (Minneapolis: H.C. Cooper Jr. & Co., 1923). In the *Guide to Wisconsin Newspapers* by Donald E. Oehlerts (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1957), the *Wood County Tribune* is cited as the derivative title of the weekly papers *Grand Rapids Tribune*, *Centralia Enterprise*, and *Centralia Enterprise and Tribune*. However, until recently, the *Wood County Tribune* seemed to be a phantom, as no actual edition of a *Wood County Tribune* had ever been seen, much less microfilmed.

Mystery solved! In the course of this research project, while combing through the third-floor archives at the SWCHC Museum, I located the May 6, 1920, edition of the *Wood County Tribune*—proving its existence and setting in place a critical historical puzzle piece. Director Pam Walker allowed me to borrow the original, long enough to make a photocopy.

In November, we’ll discuss the brief history of the *Yellow River Pilot* and other Nekoosa, Port Edwards, and Pittsville papers.

It should also be noted that, by the time you read this column, I will be at my new professional position, as a librarian in the Historical Genealogy Department at Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana. It has been an honor and a pleasure serving south Wood County’s public, and I wish SWCHC and the Library success in continuing to support projects to preserve and improve the public’s awareness of and access to local history in south Wood County.

Just another high profile *code orange*

### Sesquicentennial Alert?

Many of us remember the 1956 Wood County Centennial, during which these wooden nickels were distributed. Beards were also attempted by many local males in an attempt to appear historical.



Actual Size



Wooden nickels exchanged locally celebrated the Centennial and then-new Wood County court house. Now, fifty years later, in 2006, comes the Sesquicentennial, marking 150 years since Wood County was formed out of Portage County.

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

To: