Coach John A. Torresani (L.H.S. 1924-1966)

Homemade Lakes

Left to providence, our county would be lakeless. Only the impudent resourcefulness of man has blessed us with such reservoirs as Wazeecha, Kau-ne-win-ne, Nepco and Dexter.

Homemade lakes are at the heart of our county park system, established 50 years ago, acording to research by Ronald Arendt, Wood County Park Department administrator. In 1933, seeing no lakes other than those created for practical paper production purposes, W.A. Sprise, president of the Wood County Conservation League, had become interested in developing a lake for purely recreational purposes.

Sprise appointed a committee of S.W. Baranowski, Frank Henry and Edward Timm to study the possibility of damming the Four Mile or Ten Mile creeks.

The proposal to create a lake on the Four Mile was presented to the county board in 1935 as a means not only to provide play for the leisure class but to provide work for the Depression-era unemployed. To further these purposes, the county board, on September 17, 1935, heard a proposal from Sprise, H.G. Brogan of the Works Progress Administration and Henry Ford of the Wisconsin State Planning Commission.

A county park system was created with an appropriation of $6,000 to develop not only the south county lake, but also a site convenient to north county residents.

On November 12, 1935, a park commission of seven members was approved: Ben Hanneman, chairman; Sprise, secretary; F. George Kilp, E.P. Gleason, Joe Seidl, Edwin Riplinger and Edward Gilbertson.

By 1938, the lake at South Wood County Park stood ready to be named. A contest had been held and each judge had submitted his choice from entries received. The winning name, as sent in by James Decorah, was the Native American "Wa-Zee-Cah," which he said described the "land of pine and cedar" Wisconsin had been. The dominant features of Lake Wazeecha were its white- and red-sand beaches.

Meanwhile, a site on the Yellow River, five miles north of Pittsville, was developed into North Wood County Park. Two small, artificial lakes had been created by dams on the Yellow River. At the same meeting that Wazeecha was named, so were chosen the Chippewa-inspired Kau-ne-win-e ("Yellow River") and Ma-na-ki-ki ("Maple Forest"). Featured at North Wood County Park were a scenic river crossing, a 225-foot suspension bridge and lush vegetation.

Land for a third park was donated by the town of Arpin on April 7, 1936. Primarily a scenic, historic and winter sports site, no waterway was involved. Powers Bluff, also known as Skunk Hill, had been, for uncountable years, the home of Chippewa, Potawatomi and Winnebago. Featured at Powers Bluff were rock formations, a ski hill and spring flora.

People interested in creating a lake and park on the Yellow River, near Dexterville, brought a petition to the county board on September 13, 1957. In January of 1963, the board authorized borrowing $210,000 for land acquisition and dam construction. Matching funds were provided under the former federal Outdoor Recreation Assistance Program.

Another park was provided when, in 1976, Nekoosa Papers Inc. offered 125 acres on Nepco Lake. Groundbreaking took place June 17, 1978.

The latest county park is a 360-acre parcel now called Richfield 360, formerly property of the Wood County Asylum. It was placed under county parks management in 1978.

Park Commissioners Picnic, November 12, 1935: Will Dix, Sheriff Arthur Bero, Roy Luber, park superintendent Emil Mueller, R.B. Roberts, William Rusk, Edward Gilbertson, W.A. Sprise.

Down at the Poor Farm

Early Wood County housed its poor, for a fee, in private residences. Because many hosts lacked skill and compassion and because many indigent suffered mental and physical illness, the system often failed.

The case of Nels Johnson illustrates that failure. Johnson, 85, "one of the inmates of the asylum" kept by Richard Shay on his Rudolph farm, demanded in March 1885 that Shay kill all the chickens because Johnson preferred a life without poultry. Shay refused. Later, while Shay napped, Johnson stabbed him in the neck with a jackknife. Shay, rudely awakened, knocked Johnson "sensible" with a club. "It was a close call for Dick, but he is now around again as handsome as ever and ready for other emergencies," wrote the Centralia Enterprise of March 5.

"Dick has had at different times his two legs and one shoulder broken, his head smashed, his teeth knocked out of joint, was carried home in a blanket twice, in several pieces, and he always managed to survive. "The only way he can be killed is to blow him up with dynamite, but as crazy people can not obtain it, Richard will probably be spared for many years longer," concluded the Enterprise.

A few days later, Johnson died. Since Shay had struck him on the head, an inquest was held by Justice of the Peace M.C. Woodworth, along with S.A. Spafford, E. Lavigne, Geo. W. Baker, Nick Thomas, H.P. Johnson and E.T. Bodette. Death, they ruled, had not been the result of blows and bruises; Johnson had choked on a self-inflicted half pound of fine-cut tobacco packed in his throat.

Besides being inadequate personally, the sometimes inhumane situation of social services by private contract also was considered poor economics. Following a national trend, Wood County moved toward public institution for the poor, elderly and sick. In December 1884, the county board appointed a committee of R.V. Lyon, J.A. Gaynor and Charles A. Coon to purchase real estate for working and living quarters known as a "poor farm." The committee chose the Hamilton Canning place near Port Edwards, in sections 23 and 26, Seneca township.

A second committee of J.W. Cochran, Seth Spafford and Coon reported that the Canning farm cost $1,900 for 160 acres, of which 65 were cultivated. On the grounds were a good frame barn, a smaller barn with a wagon shed attached, a sheep shed, a corn crib and a frame house.

After a severe winter, work commenced on a 30- by 60-foot addition to the house on April 8, 1885. It was finished in early June amidst a minor bureaucratic controversy summarized by the Grand Rapids Tribune on April 9, 1885: "This institution, if managed with care, judgement and economy, will prove vastly cheaper than the 'township system' for which it was substituted. If it is not well managed, it will prove in this county—as it has in some others—a fertile source of waste and annoyance and even more expensive."

So far, said the Tribune, the farm had been managed by two successive committees of the county board, a practice destined for failure. The only safe plan would be to elect an independent board of overseers, similar to a school board. This was accomplished on June 18, 1885, with the election of Charles A. Coon as Superintendent of the Poor, assisted by a committee of P. McCamley and P.N. Christensen.

A reporter visited the poor farm shortly after it was completed. He said the old Canning house had been transformed into a large kitchen.

A new building, with a porch the length of it, had been erected on the south side. Inside was a spacious dining hall and sitting rooms on each side, one for men, the other for women. Sleeping apartments upstairs were similarly segregated.

Wrote the journalist:

"We now have a refuge for those too old to work or too indigent, through sickness or accident, to secure a home for themselves of which any community might well be proud, and very fastidious indeed must be the poor, who will not appreciate the comforts of the new institution, secured for them at the expense of the good people of this county."

The facility was well-intentioned, but problems were not eliminated completely. Another journalist visited in November 1885, counting 13 inmates, "several feeble minded and a few not far from crazy."

A woman from Marshfield had recently escaped. When poormaster George Baker attempted to bring her back, she threw a stone at his head and fought him tooth and nail until she was finally returned and locked in her room.

"Old lady Polensky" also left the farm and was brought back, to be found later "in a fit" behind the dining room stove.

"Old Bat" Purier, once a well-to-do saloon keeper

but for 18 years a pauper, experienced a "slight difficulty" with another inmate known as Lame Pete and went to Grand Rapids "mad as a hatter," refusing to return to the farm.

"There are many sad and heart-rending occurrences taking place constantly at such a place as a poor farm," observed the newsman.

In 1886, poormaster Baker received $500; a physician, $130; the hired man, $132.32; and the hired girl, $64.50.

At the beginning of the year, there were 13 inmates; at the end, 14. A total of 31 persons had been cared for. One had died. One had married. Two children were bound out. Thirteen were discharged or left on their own accord.

Two "insane paupers" not at the poor farm had been under the care of Eli Taylor at an expense of $368.33.

The poor farm committee recommended erection of a building on the poor farm for accommodation of idiots and insane as cheaper for the county and more beneficial to "these unhappy persons."

A variety of crops was raised, including hay, corn, oats, mangel wurzels and carrots, lowering the actual cost to the county of the farm to $585.89 for the year, or 11¾ cents per day for each inmate.

On June 23, 1887, another writer, after a picnic at nearby Kipp's Hill, stopped at the poor farm, where he and his friends were received cordially by Mr. and Mrs. Baker while the shrieks of Anna Reeves sounded through the house and Old Lady Polensky threw her arms around visitor George Brazeau's neck and kissed him.

The old lady from Marshfield appeared to be reciting the Lord's Prayer over and over, although, said Mrs. Baker, she was not all that devout.

"Our short visit impressed us all with the idea of thankfulness," wrote the journalist, "that we were blessed with healthy bodies and strong minds."

Vi Palmer's Album

Vi Palmer (1889-1984), with her Moravian friends, used to take the street car to Seneca Road and walk to the poor farm. "We city people were interested in farm animals," she said. She did not mention that poormaster Jim Case also had, at different times, wolves, bears, foxes, ponies and monkeys. "We would take baskets of food," said Miss Palmer. "Mr. Case would divide it up.

"He taught the people to love animals and have pets. I was playing with a kitten, wearing a dress down to my ankles, when the kitty lost her manners. That's where the pump came in handy.

"Mr. Case did more in a Christian way than you'll ever believe. He had a grand sense of humor and a grand Catholic manner. The way he treated those people, even if they didn't deserve it! Mr. and Mrs. Case made those people as important as anyone. After all, they lived on Mr. Case's farm."

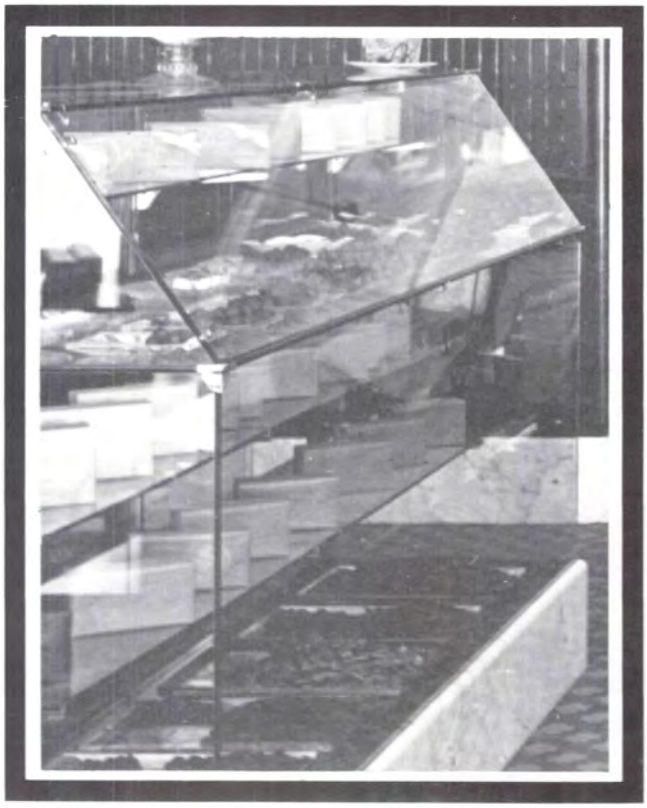
Case, with assistance from his wife, Emily, was superintendent or "poormaster" 1897-1904 and 1912-28. Other superintendents were George Baker (1885-87), James Gibson (1887-90), Albert Abrams (1890-97) and William Haskins (1904-1912).

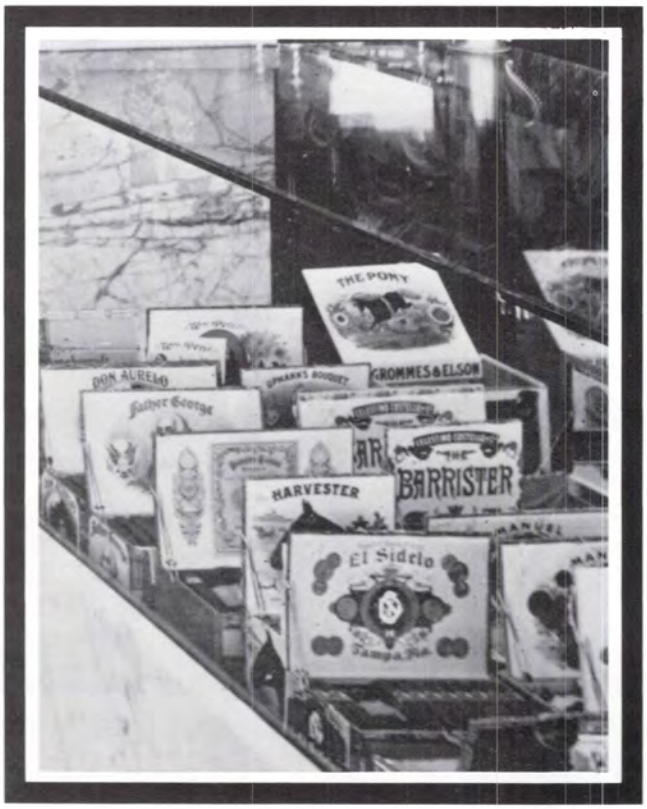
Mary Bruener, Port Edwards, worked for $16 a month as cook for Case, "a corker of an Irishman." All the inmates lived in one house, she said. The men lived in the big part. Upstairs was all bedrooms. Everyone ate in the dining room. "The old people," said Mrs. Bruener, "couldn't live without their potatoes." She made 18 loaves of bread per day in the busy winter.

At Christmas, a church group would come and sing; a special meal was provided. The men got tobacco or snuff. The women got handkerchiefs. In spring, some of the inmates left. Over the year, some died. Mr. Case would wash and dress them, and bury them next door at the county cemetery.

Vi holding pump handle

Barnes Candy Kitchen





Candy Kitchen

The Devolution of Prentiss-Wabers

In 1915, a Mr. Prentiss and a Mr. Wabers, wearing linen dusters and goggles, drove through Wisconsin, searching for a city that would provide them with capital and a permanent site, so they could move their camp-stove factory from Racine. The two hoped to make portable gasoline stoves that would be popular with automobile tourists.

In January 1915, Prentiss and Wabers put their proposition before a meeting of the Grand Rapids Merchants and Manufacturers Association, the forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce.

The association agreed to back the project. On February 8, at an organizational meeting, Prentiss-Wabers Manufacturing Co. was launched as a corporation with a capital of $20,000, of which $12,000 was raised by local stock subscriptions. Stockholders elected as directors of the original company were D.B. Philleo, T.A. Taylor, C.W. Rood, Prentiss and Wabers.

Quarters in the old Wipperman building were occupied for about three years, when the company moved to the Rood Construction building three blocks away.

Prentiss and Wabers remained with the company for several seasons and departed, having failed to demonstrate managerial ability. The interests of Prentiss and Wabers were taken over by local stockholders, and the original officers of the company handled the business for some time.

Little better than defunct

After World War I, the company fell on evil days. "In a simple sort of way," according to a 1925 Tribune, Philleo and Amos Hasbrouck kept the firm alive during 1918 and 1919. Hasbrouck took over manufacturing, and Philleo, the business end.

Hope sprung anew, and T.A. Taylor, president, took active charge of a reorganization that increased capital to $60,000. The firm began a period of expansion under the new name of Prentiss-Wabers Stove Co. After two years, more capital was needed, and capitalization increased to $100,000. "It was not all paid in, however, at the time and, although production was good and sales fair, the company did not prosper."

Taylor, the largest stockholder, retired and later sold out his interests. After filling all orders of the 1923 season, the factory shut down.

"With its limited line of products commanding only an uncertain market, and with assets consisting of only $10,000 in machinery, the company appeared little better than defunct," said a 1934 Daily Tribune.

An industrial doctor

Through the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce, Ralph S. Wiltrout, a new general manager, and M.W. Woolf, sales manager, were induced to come and take over the company. Wiltrout was described as a specialist in administering to sick industries, "indeed an industrial doctor."

On September 1, 1923, Wiltrout assumed command. "The credit of the company was completely gone. Large accounts payable were past due, the factory had been shut down, the sales were at a low ebb." Wiltrout reorganized the manufacturing and business departments, and bolstered up creditors. The name was changed to Prentiss-Wabers Products Co. After 1923, officers were C.F. Kruger, president; Hasbrouck, vice president; and Philleo, secretary.

A 1925 Daily Tribune reported there were about 25 stockholders, mainly the original investors. The company was "all home owned . . . strictly a Wisconsin Rapids institution." It grew by leaps and bounds. Total 1925 sales of $250,000 were an increase of 400 percent over 1923. Employment rose from 25 to 55. The weekly payroll reached $2,000.

Various products were offered: six models of camp stoves, a collapsible oven, a syphon to draw gasoline from the tank of the car to the camp stove, a folding stand to raise the camp stove to table height, a table and chairs that folded into a compact suitcase; a collapsible canvas chair.

Production in the new building would be brought to 600 stoves per day, a 50 percent increase, and that did not include camp equipment. New machinery, such as lathes, drills, presses and spot welders, was being installed.

Previous quarters in the Wipperman and Rood buildings had been rented. Hope was high in 1925 as a new factory was constructed. "Prentiss-Wabers Products Co. is the leading manufacturer of camp stoves in the country, out distancing their rivals in every department and, with orders already booked for 1926, give positive evidence of being the largest manufacturers of camp stoves in the world," said the Tribune.

For many years, Prentiss-Wabers was a seasonal institution, shut down from time to time. There were no shutdowns in 1925. In the roaring twenties, the company just couldn't make stoves fast enough.

A full porcelain line

In 1934, a line of porcelain stoves was moved from a Chicago factory to Wisconsin Rapids, where 170 men worked on their fabrication. Double shifts were planned, and 325 men employed. Prentiss-Wabers rehabilitated the Sampson Canning Co. building and the J.R. Ragan furniture warehouse for assembly and storage of the gas kitchen ranges.

It was largely through the efforts of Sales Manager Michael Woolf and his assistant, Verna Denniston Kortkamp, said the Tribune, that the new unit housed in the Sampson building was brought to Wisconsin Rapids.

New employees arrived from Chicago, expecting hardwood floors, snug-fitting windows, adequate plumbing and central heating, said the Tribune. The city was embarrassed by the lack of suitable modern homes, and a writer urged owners of Victorian homes to modernize while speculating on the possibility of company-owned houses.

In 1934, Prentiss-Wabers had jobbers, mail-order houses, and dealers in all parts of the United States and 16 foreign countries. It had warehouses in New York, Los Angeles and Texas.

The Ideal World Below

With her Betty Crocker cookbook, ballpoint pen, colored telephone and a fresh cup of coffee, the 1957 housewife could enjoy an ideal world (not to mention two Wallchef ovens, two Counterchef units, an electrical refrigerator and an Evectair range hood—all by Preway.)

More prosperity

World War II also provided prosperity, with $10 million in government contracts and not a single shipment returned or rejected.

Before the war, Prentiss-Wabers had manufactured gas stoves, fuel-oil circulating heaters, blow torches, lanterns, picnic-lunch boxes and camp stoves. The first war contract was July 1, 1942, for bombs, detonator fuses and field-kitchen equipment. During the war, most civilian products were eliminated, except for kerosene stoves, trailer stoves and fuel-oil heaters.

The 1950s remained prosperous. Clippings from the files of McMillan Memorial Library show that $12.5 million in 1957 sales totaled the best in the history of the company, now known as Preway. Office and factory payroll amounted to $3,090,353.

Changes in lines were tried, including a refrigerator in 1956 and, in 1961, "the first" dishwasher to use gas during its wash cycle.

Employment still tended to be seasonal. In 1959 and 1960, Preway averaged 712 workers. But, in December 1960, only 442 were on payroll. In spring, employment was expected to rise, when production started on space heaters for the following season.

In the 1960s, a shift was made from cooking to heating equipment. Employment averaged 380 per month. Sales in 1965 were $8,160,000. In 1967, Preway acquired Kainer Wesco Corp., a Wheeling, Ill., supplier of hardware to the boat industry, in an attempt to diversify the "product mix." Sales reached $10.5 million in 1967. Employment in 1967 averaged 492 monthly.

In 1969, Sta-Rite, a Delavan manufacturer of water systems, pumps, rubber and plastic components, and other items, nearly purchased Preway. At the time, Preway manufactured gas and electric built-in ranges, gas and oil-burning space heaters, furnaces, free-standing fireplaces and kitchen ventilator hoods.

Merger talks with Sta-Rite, however, were dropped that year.

In 1979, Preway opened a plant in Stevens Point's industrial park.

The Arkla problem

In 1984, after actively seeking a company in the Sunbelt to acquire, Preway purchased, for $99.9 million, two divisions of Arkla Industries, one in Evansville, Ind., and the other in Paragould, Ark. Arkla manufactured gas-fired outdoor grills and air conditioners, and was, like Preway, a long-time supplier to Sears Roebuck and Co.

The purchase caused Preway to assume $60 million in liabilities and borrow $40 million of the $50 million in cash paid.

Other Preway plants in 1984 were in Perris, California; Killeen, Texas; and the Netherlands. The Stevens Point plant closed that year.

The Arkla acquisition proved to be a deadly weight. According to the Milwaukee Journal of August 11, 1985, Preway was up to its corporate ears in debt because of Arkla. Losses for 1984 were $6.1 million.

In July 1985, Preway said it had filed suit against Arkla and Preway's former auditor for $50 million in actual damages, plus punitive and other damages. If the true nature of Arkla had been known, said the suit, Preway wouldn't have bought it at such a high price. "Did (President William) Thomas (Jr.) pay too much, or was he a victim of shabby numbers and estimates?" asked the Journal.

Bankruptcy was considered a possibility in 1985, said James W. Egan, who had replaced Thomas as chief executive officer on March 30, 1986. There had been a loss of $9 million in nine months, a furnace liability problem caused by Arkla, default of several provisions of Preway's bank-loan agreement, and a bank that expressed grave concerns about Preway's ability to survive until 1986.

In March 1986, said Egan, Preway sold Cox Geleen, its Dutch subsidiary. It also took steps to streamline its operations and consolidate facilities, such as the Memphis, Tennessee warehouse into the Paragould operation. The Evansville gas-furnace operation was sold to Trane Co. of La Crosse at a recorded loss of $600,000.

In 1986, the suit was settled with Arkla, which was required to invest $4 million in Preway stock and pay Preway about $2.6 million in cash.

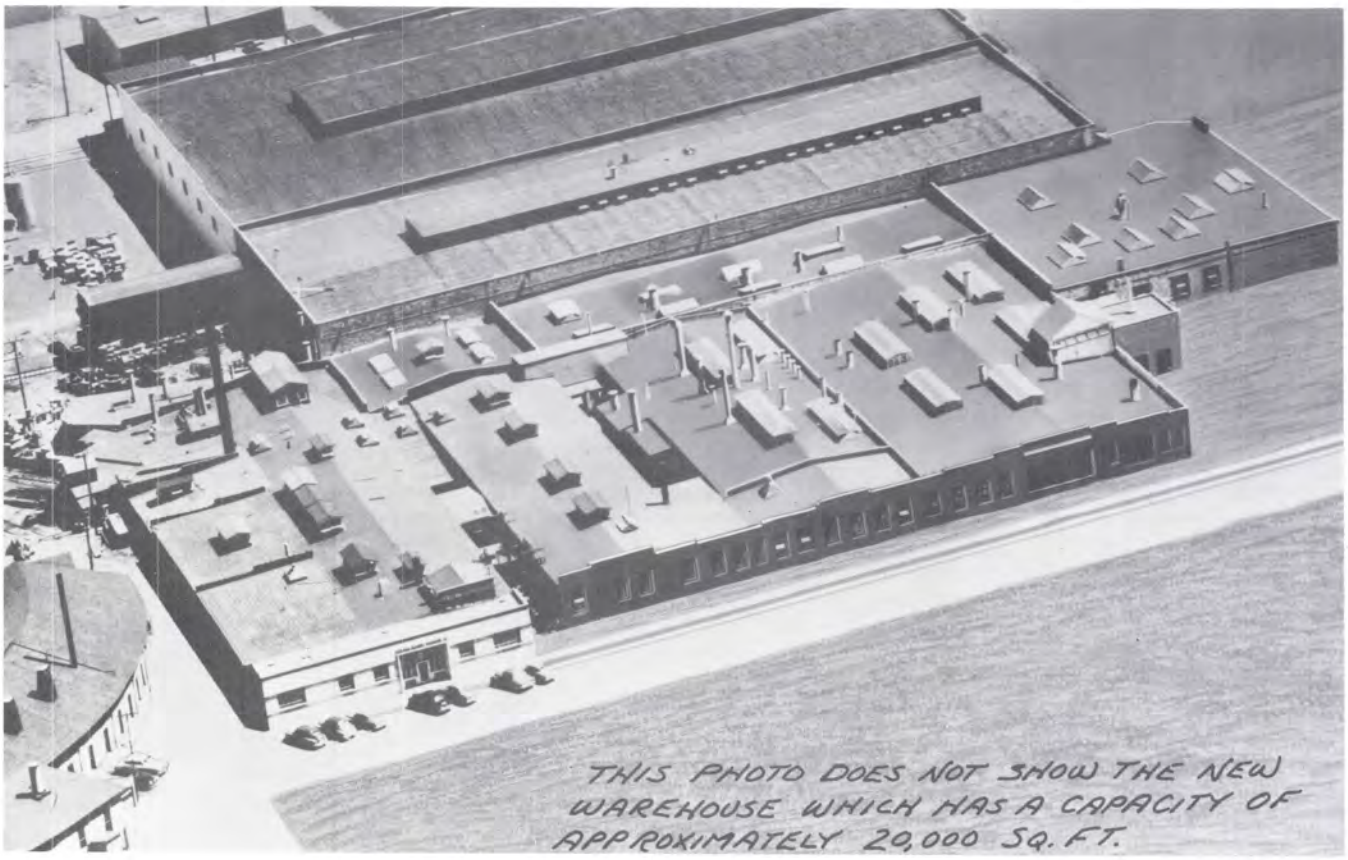
Post Preway

In 1986, Preway moved its corporate headquarters to Stamford, Connecticut. Egan said the Wisconsin Rapids plant would not be affected—although the future of the plant naturally would be subject to the marketplace. "We're going to maintain the fireplace division," he said.

On March 24, 1987, Preway reported a $12.3 million loss for 1986, compared with $13.9 million in 1985. On August 21, it was announced that machinery, equipment and inventory of the Preway Inc. plant had been sold to Mobex Acquisition Corp. II of Anaheim, California, an affiliate of Superior Fireplace Co. The purchase did not include the building.

Preway's fireplace operations in Wisconsin Rapids were scheduled to close after a minimum of 60 days. Preway's oil and gas-heater operations also were taken from Wisconsin Rapids to an Arkansas barbecue-grill town of 15,000 that had burdened us before, ironically named Paragould.

All of which would attempt Prentiss and/or Wabers to remind us that all that glistens is not gilt, although some of it is.



Preway in the 1950s

Hopa Tree

In the winter of 1965, said the Daily Tribune, Wisconsin Rapids was caught up by "the world's most powerful single force . . . an idea."

That idea had emerged on a balmy day the previous spring as Daniel P. Meyer, then president of the Chamber of Commerce, and Richard Brazeau, civic leader and attorney, walked from the Consolidated Papers, Inc. office building. Brazeau looked along the Wisconsin River and admired a flowering crab apple tree. Isn't that beautiful," he said. "Let's plant some more flowering trees to beautify the city. That's a project the Chamber ought to tackle."

As Brazeau explained, some years ago his mother, Mrs. T.W. Brazeau, had been involved with garden clubs that worked to beautify the city by planting lilacs. He wanted to revive the tradition.

"Very good, Dick," said Meyer, "Maybe you'd like to chair the committee." The ebullient Brazeau accepted the challenge and was appointed chairman of a Chamber of Commerce Education and General Welfare subcommittee. According to his wife, Virginia, Brazeau had admired a neighbor's flowering crab, saying, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to have those trees all over town?"

The trees would be planted along the river banks as a scenic attraction similar to the cherry blossoms at the Tidal Basin in Washington D.C. The Brazeaus had lived in the nation's capital the last two years of World War II after Richard's release from the Navy hospital at Pearl Harbor.

"We were close to the Tidal Basin," she said. "In spring, with gas rationing in effect, we walked every day and enjoyed all the flowering shrubs."

On January 25, 1965, Brazeau likened the Hopa movement to a three-edged sword. "It will beautify the city for those who live here, it will benefit everybody with the hospital receiving the profits and the attraction of visitors will be like a 'new industry.' "

Inspired by Brazeau, the Wisconsin Rapids Park and Recreation Commission asked for $1,500 to buy 500 Hopa trees that would be planted along the river banks. In early February, the Daily Tribune and radio station WFHR offered to landscape Robinson Park with Hopas.

Homeowners too would be encouraged to join the project.

Brazeau met with Ruth Fretz and Ida Lee Siewert, both of the Riverview Hospital Auxiliary and convinced the auxiliary to take over the sales effort. Lee Jens of Jens Nursery and Landscape Co. volunteered to act as agent. Trees were rounded up from many states and supplied to the auxiliary at cost. All profits would go to Riverview Hospital.

A telephone canvass proved successful beyond expectations as members of the auxiliary and area garden clubs from February 8, 1965, to March 1 contacted 5,000 subscribers, sold 3,279 trees to 2,100 householders and earned $4,000 for the hospital.

On April 28, 1965, a message was reported from the White House. "The President and Mrs. Johnson send best wishes for the success of your project and for the planting of many new trees." Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall wrote to Brazeau's beautification committee, congratulating it on a "pace-setting" example in the national program of beautification. A full page in the Daily Tribune announced a "clamor on the part of individuals to help make Wisconsin Rapids the Flowering Hopa Tree Capital."

As the project moved along, many wondered just what a Hopa tree was anyway.

The Daily Tribune reported Hopa lore pulled together by Lee Jens. The Hopa is a flowering crab about 20 feet tall. The blossoms bud in bright red and advance to deep pink giving off a pleasing fragrance. Originated in 1920 by Niels E. Hanson, professor of horticulture at Brookings, S.D., the first local trees had been planted about 15 years previous. Jens pointed out that the Hopa seemed to be insect and

disease free and had survived the extremely damaging winter of 1947-48. "It is one of the few flowering crabs that combine a good and attractive fruit with an outstanding bloom," Jens said. The price would be $3-10.

By mid-April, 1965, the massive Hopa beautification project moved into a distribution phase with "Operation Pickup" at Jens Nursery and Landscape on the east end of Saratoga Street. As Jens scrambled to fill the last orders, Hopa enthusiasm had consumed almost all Hopa stock in the country.

Consolidated Papers, Inc. joined in by planting 50 trees on its local properties, including a horseshoe planting on the Mead Inn lawn. Jens said Hopas for Consolidated would be procured from a nursery begun at Oconomowoc by the late Walter Mead, former company official.

PROFITABLE PROJECT—In the process of making Wisconsin Rapids the "Hopa Tree Center" of Wisconsin, the Riverview Hospital Auxiliary also earned more than $4,000 for the hospital building project through the sale of the trees. Mrs. Leland Jens, center, presented the check to the project co-chairmen, Mrs. Robert Fretz (left) and Mrs. John Siewert. Jens Nursery provided the trees at cost, with all profits going to the hospital.

On May 1, 1965, South Wood County was dedicated as the "Hopa Tree Center of Wisconsin" by Gov. Warren Knowles, a friend of Brazeau. Knowles noted 4,000 Hopas planted—350 in city parks. Wearing a "We like it here" button, Knowles installed a "Governor's Tree" at the southeast entrance to the Jackson Street Bridge and predicted that in the future a blossom festival would make Wisconsin Rapids famous as the flowering cherries had done for Washington D.C.

Mayor Nels M. Justeson presented a pair of Hopa trees to the governor for the lawn of the executive mansion in Madison. Brazeau said "I sincerely hope that this is but the beginning of an area beautification program."

In January, 1966, Meyer presented a Chamber of Commerce Service Award to Brazeau (who died July 24, 1968) "for launching this beautification program which has not only enriched the aesthetic values of our area but has also raised funds for our new hospital." Also presented with an award was president Mrs. Robert Johnson in behalf of the hospital auxiliary.

Hopa fever did not end with the planting. The Daily Tribune of May 19, 1966, announced: "An event which gives promise of being a red letter one on our community calendar, now and in succeeding springs, will have its premiere this weekend . . . We refer, of course, to the first annual Hopa Tree Festival and Miss Wisconsin Rapids Pageant.

"The Hopa Tree Festival, if it receives the kind of local support which will assure its continuance on an annual basis, can bring the South Wood County area a tremendous amount of valuable publicity and attract visitors from far and near."

It was still too early, said the Tribune, to expect full dividends in scenic beauty from the Hopas, which were still too immature to reach full flowering and delayed due to unseasonable cold . . . "yet it is none too early to promote our community as Hopa tree center of the Midwest."

McMillan's Journal

Before George McMillan could begin accumulating the fortune whose destination was, in part, McMillan Memorial Library, he had to fight the War Between the States.

Enlisting at the onset in 1861, he continued as a Union soldier until the war's end. Many of McMillan's diary accounts have been placed in the archives of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. The following excerpts depict events in spring 1865 as McMillan, with Sherman's army, marched through North Carolina.

In the field (March 18, 1865)

Move out at 4. Go like mischief for 3 or 5 miles then halt. Heavy firing in front. We turn to the left about 3 miles expecting to go to reinforce the other corps. Hear firing most all day.

In the field, N.C. (March 19)

Rebs in advance. Sometimes carry rails half a mile to bridge swamps. Hear very heavy cannonading to our left.

Cross Youngs Creek. Men wade it. Get into camp at 4 near white church. Heavy fighting all afternoon to our left near Falling Creek. I shaved off clean.

In the field (March 20)

Scribner wakes me up at 2. Orders to move at 3. I hunt for the train. Orders to move without train. Layed around til 7.

While there a conscript shot Raefield of Co C in the foot. Cross Falling Creek. Made it up to our knees. March near 22 miles. Now on the Fayetteville Road.

Betinsvill (March 21)

At night go back 3 miles with the foragers to (illegible). 5 girls there. Have a good time. Stay up till 10½. Heavy firing all night.

Bentonsville (March 22)

Found out that the Jonnies had got up and skedaddled. They charge the 4 divs of 15 Corp during the night and was repulsed every time. Our loss quite heavy.

I go with foragers about 7 miles then turn around and go back to camp. Orders that this campaign is ended. Part of the Army moving to Goldsboro.

Bentonsville (March 23)

Wind blow awful and sand. It is awful almost like a snow storm. Men look awful hard with dust.

Near Neuse River (March 24)

Stop near Goldsboro and form the column then march in. Men looked rather tough but in good spirit.

Goldsboro (March 25)

Provisional division is broken up. Men come back to the Reg to have a social time all feeling gay and happy in camp.

Goldsboro (March 26)

I received 18 letters some long ones. I drew 6 days rations of coffee sugar and bread. Draw quite a little clothing.

Have quite a time reading letters. Write a letter to A.M.M. Day pass very pleasantly.

Near Goldsboro (March 28)

Draw 4 days rations for recruits. Then get 1487 pounds of fresh beef or rather bones. Order to make pay rolls to receive pay to February 28. Men all busy building shanties. I and Joe Bowers build one for him and me.

Goldsboro (March 29)

Draw 600 pounds of salt junk 446 of salt pork for regts. Fix up my tent. Have a nice comfortable place to sleep and write to the following named persons: A.M.M. . . .

Goldsboro (March 30)

Reg have dress parade. Looks splendid.

Goldsboro (March 30)

Pleasant. Nothing of importance.

Goldsboro (April 1)

Regiments have inspection of knapsacks to see what citizen property they have. That all taken from them. Boys bury all their extras. Receive a letter from Archie. Write several large ones to A.M.M.

(April 2)

Another lovely day. Letter from A.M.M. Have a horse race between Sanburg and Hank Lundown. $20 aside. Former wins.

Goldsboro (April 4)

Genl Sherman's brother-in-law rides around in the afternoon. Hear a good many rumors about Grant.

(Also on April 4, George wrote to his brother, Archie):

Have nothing to do now, only to draw rations . . . but I expect it won't last long for there is strong talk of soon commencing on another campaign that is going to decide the matter some way.

The sooner they move the sooner this Rebelion will be brought to a close. They say that this is not the end of the campaign but merely a rest to receive clothing and shoes but I think this next move will at least get the Armies in position to strike the final and fatal blow.

(April 5)

I draw rations and issue a good assortment of groceries. Write to A.M.M. at night. Expecting to move about the tenth.

(April 6)

Lay on my (illegible) all forenoon. In the afternoon I go over to the 18th Wisconsin. Stay there till sunset

then go to town. Hear glorious news from Grant. I go to Col. Mill's office to see about any commutation papers.

(April 7)

Race Jim S. and H. Lundow horses. Former win $25. Bet on side. Get a paper containing the glorious news from Richmond.

(April 8)

Division received by Blair, Legget, Force and Ewing: Many said we had the prettiest camp of the corps.

At 6 at night I go and draw five days rations and issue pay. Through at 10. Rockets going off all over. Firing salutes for the victory achieved.

(April 9)

Preparing for a move. Suppose to be going to Raleigh. Men have to carry 6 days ration and 60 pounds of ammunition.

(April 10)

Get up at 3. Get ready to move at 6 but stand around until 4 and then move slow. Reg band plays. Women all out looking at us going through town.

Halt at the depot for about 2 hours then move out pretty lively. Get into camp at 10 to 7. Raining like the devil.

Pine Level Station (April 12)

Hear that Lee had surrendered his camp to Grant and . . . that Sherman had notified Johnson and that the latter was coming to surrender his army but hardly credit the yarn.

Moccasin Swamp (18th)

Wood ticks thicker than hail. Takes about 4 hours to go through Moccasin Swamp only 3 miles across.

In the field (April 14)

Go like the devil across Neuse River at Battle Bridge or where it was rebs had burnt that bridge. Heard that Sherman is in town. Stop near town and fix bayonets and march through Raleigh in gay style.

Band stops in front of the capitol opposite Geo. Washingtons monument and played while the division passes through. Women are out with water. Day most awful hot.

(April 16)

Beautiful day. No news from the front that is reliable to note. Chance to wash up and change. Write to A.M.M.

Raleigh (17th)

Gen Sherman goes out to the front to see Johnson. I draw two days rations.

Hear the sad news of Lincoln and Sewards men here raised to an awful pitch. Flags all down at half mast. Band plays mournful dirges. Sherman returned at night.

Raleigh (19th)

Heard that Johnson had surrendered.

Raleigh (21st)

Great speculating when we will go home. I say that I will be home on the 4th.

Raleigh (April 22)

Men get the camp all cleaned up. Orders no more pickets. I write to A.M.M. Feel lonely for every one is always talking of sweet home.

Raleigh (April 23)

Go to church. Baptist. Never seen a building as crowded as it was. Heard a splendid sermon from Ephesians 4th. Grieve not the spirit.

Raleigh (April 24)

Corps was received on Fayetteville Street by Grant, Sherman, Mays and others.

(April 26)

Hear at night that Johnson had surrendered.

Morristown (April 27)

Move back to our camp at Raleigh. I and Chas. Richardson start at 6 to save our shanties. Receive letter from A.M.M.

Raleigh (April 28)

Have the full particulars of the surrender. Expecting to start for home soon.

Raleigh (April 29)

Men still acting as if the year of jubilation had come.

Cannons booming all morning. Men throwing their cartridges away. Placing hundreds in heaps under ground and touching fire. Hot. Sweat. Cross two rivers. Heavy rain. Dark. I get wet through. My tent caves in.

George McMillan

Benefaction

The munificence of the Scotch provided more than one library for our town.

However, the first such institution seems to have been a project of the Odd Fellows. A March 25, 1886, Wood County Reporter said 31 new volumes had been added to the Odd Fellows public library at Mrs. Peeso's store. "The Waverly novels and Thomas' travels are among the list. More books will be purchased during the year. Books are issued at the rate of 10 cents for two weeks."

The free T.B. Scott Library was established in 1889 by the will of Thomas Blythe Scott, a lumberman who left $5,000, provided the city furnish "proper housing." Scott, who had been born in Scotland, died in Merrill, leaving $10,000 for a library there. Both libraries, Scott decreed, would be "forever free for the use of the inhabitants."

On December 20, 1889, the Common Council voted to build a combined library and city hall. The Rablin property at 1st and Baker streets was chosen. Temporary quarters were found in the upper floors of a J.D. Witter building between the First National Bank and the Central Hotel, on the East Bank.

With the help of a fund-raising "paper carnival" in the Daly Theater, the library opened March 22, 1890.

The new City Hall and library building was completed by January 1, 1892, at a cost of $14,251.42. It included a clock and bell for the tower.

In February 1892, J.D. Witter donated $5,000 to purchase reading material.

It was suggested that Witter's name be placed at the side of Scott's but Witter refused, stating that if the good influence of the library was increased, the sole purpose of his gift was accomplished. Also critical to the building of the library was the support of Grand Rapids Mayor Frank Wood.

After the library moved to its new quarters in July 1892, the city began paying a janitor and furnishing light and heat. It also borrowed $3,000 from the Scott Library money to furnish the building, and voted an annual appropriation of $500.

In the dual-purpose facility, four rooms had been set aside on the second floor for the library. Also on the second floor were the council chambers and the city sealer of weights and measures. Occupying the first floor was the fire station.

Upon consolidation of Grand Rapids and Centralia in 1900, "City Hall" moved to the West Side and the entire upper floor of the Grand Rapids site was given to the library.

In 1907, another $5,000 came from the J.D. Witter estate for a traveling library. This time, since Witter was unable to object, the institution carried on in his name.

The city's expenses rose to $1,800 in 1919, $3,000 in 1921 and $4,000 in 1922.

In 1923, when the entire "old City Hall" was given over to the library, the city appropriated $5,000 for remodeling the old downstairs fire house.

Space in the enlarged T.B. Scott Library was allocated for the Federation of Women's Clubs, the city nurse (Mrs. Schroedel), the city superintendent of schools (Julius Winden) and the Boy Scouts.

When Winden and the city nurse moved to the new Lincoln High School, two rooms were given over to the J.D. Witter Traveling Library.

Another benefactor joined Scott and Witter in 1925 when F.J. Wood donated $3,500—$100 for each year he served on the library board—to be paid in yearly installments of $500.

Another $10,000 came from the Scott family in 1926, this time from T.B. Scott Jr., who gave $5,000 to buy new books and equipment. He requested that the library remain a permanent memorial to his father.

The Witter family again supported the T.B. Scott Library in 1929 with a $4,000 gift from Isaac P. Witter, board treasurer, who also gave $1,000 to the J.D. Witter Traveling Library.

Depression economics threatened library functioning and the wishes of T.B. Scott that privileges remain forever free.

In 1932, the county's appropriation was eliminated and the library became "obliged" to charge $1 per year from users. Whether through economics or ire, the number of borrowers dropped from 1,400 to 45.

Funds for the J.D. Witter Traveling Library also were eliminated but $500 was re-established in 1933. The Witter Library served about 40 sites in rural schools, post offices, country stores and homes.

The county, in 1934, reestablished support for the T.B. Scott Library in the amount of $1,000, of which Wisconsin Rapids paid $414.63.

Relief from another benefactor came in 1933 as a gift from former resident Laura Mae Corrigan.

A long Daily Tribune library article in 1934 noted that 93,000 books had been circulated the previous year. The writer strongly supported the institution: "It is a service which an intelligent group of people could not do without in these bewildering times of flux and change. "The consciousness that, like the schools, its existence is a necessity if democracy is to exist, is becoming more and more an axiom in the minds of the people.

"It is certainly as least costly a safeguard against

the black depth of ignorance as is possible to imagine."

In 1942, Isaac Witter's estate brought $15,000 to the "Isaac P. Witter Book Fund."

The public library moved for the third time in 1948, to the former home of Isaac and Charlotte Witter on Third Street, purchased by George W. Mead for $15,000 and presented to the city.

On the first floor was the library office, two rooms of shelves, two reference rooms and two reading rooms. Two large rooms on the second floor were designated as the children's section.

Miss Jessie Sanford, head librarian, said that for the first time, there was enough room for books on the shelves.

The T.B. Scott Library provided until 1970, when Mary McMillan Burt erased Tom Scott's name from the learning resource center and replaced it with another from the land of plaid, that of her own clan, McMillan.

T.B. Scott Library

McMillan

McMillan

Above: The adult room and stacks were located on the first floor of the second T.B. Scott Library.

Right:
The children's room was on the second floor of what is now the historical museum.

A McMillan Memorial

To whom is the McMillan Memorial Library a memorial?

The answer begins in 19th century Scotland, where Daniel McMillan and Isabella Baird were born. Daniel moved to Manchester, England, to work as a machinist. Isabella went to live with relatives. They met, married in 1838 and had three children: Archie, George and Margaret.

In England, the children attended a private school. When the family left for America, it was impossible to return school books and slate so they were brought along.

Daniel pursued the machinist trade in New York for two years, when he caught a cold that developed into tuberculosis. Because English friends in Waushara County recommended the curative properties of the Wisconsin climate, the McMillans followed in 1852.

Near Pine River, Daniel bought a farm. He became active in politics, serving on the school and town boards, and as clerk of circuit court. But Daniel's health continued to fail. He died in February 1856, at age 47. His survivors included another son, Daniel, born in New York.

Although there were no schools in Pine River, the boys were determined to continue their education. After the day's work, they studied the books they had brought from England—by the light of burning pine knots and a rag inserted in a saucer of lard.

Archie

The oldest child of Daniel and Isabella was born April 8, 1839, at Manchester. When he was 6, a neighbor boy kicked him in his left hip and that left him lame. In surgery performed in Manchester in 1846, Archie became one of the first patients to whom ether was administered.

At Pine River, Archie married Margaret Ann Courtney Moore, widow of Joseph Moore. Maggie had been born at East Troy in 1846. Her family moved to Saxeville, near Pine River.

Archie, a supporter of Abraham Lincoln, could not serve in the War Between the States so he carried on the farm, acquiring a good stock of cattle, sheep and hogs.

In 1876, Archie was elected as a Republican to clerk of Waushara County Circuit Court. In April 1891, he retired from farming.

Partly to enter a partnership with his brother, George, and partly to obtain a better education for his daughters, Anna and Mary, Archie moved his family to Centralia.

Archie bought a partnership in a cranberry marsh, purchased and shipped farm produce, built the first potato warehouse in the city and invested in the new Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co.

The second year after Archie came to Centralia, he was elected city clerk. He served as school board member, jury commissioner and trustee of the Congregational Church.

In 1911, Archie contracted typhoid fever, which aggravated his old hip ailment. He became an invalid until his death in 1922, at age 83.

When Archie died, Maggie said, "I have had my wish. I have had the strength to care for him as long as he needed me."

At his death, Archie left items of value: $150 in 1918 war savings stamps, $1,000 in two Jackson Milling Co. bonds, $3,400 in liberty bonds, $39,000 in 130 shares of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., and $50 in one share of Wood County Telephone Co.

He left everything to Maggie "because I know that when the necessity requires it, my said wife will do for our said children what I would wish to do if living."

Maggie died at her 1341 3rd St. S. home on August 26, 1937. She owned 30 shares in Wisconsin Rapids Building and Loan, 3,250 shares in Consolidated, one share in Wood County Telephone Co., and real estate.

The total estate of $77,220.22 went to daughters Mary and Anna.

George

Born in Manchester December 13, 1840, George McMillan attended a New York ward school until his father's health failed and George took a job weaving insertions for ladies' bonnets at 25 cents a day.

"I left school the first week without the knowledge of my parents," he said.

"I worked that week and came home and deposited the $1.55 I earned in my mother's lap. She was not aware that I had left my school and broke down weeping.

"I felt prouder when I handed my mother that dollar and a half that Saturday night than any money I have ever received since."

George lived with his family in Pine River from 1852 until August 1861, when he enlisted in Company A. 16th Wisconsin Infantry.

In March 1862, Company A was engaged in the battle of Shiloh, where George and two others left their outpost, under heavy fire, to rescue the body of their captain. George's companions were both killed. George was recognized for his deeds and appointed first sergeant.

Later, George marched with Sherman through the Carolinas, after which the regiment went to Washington to pass in the grand review.

Upon return from the war, George worked in the John Williams general store in Saxeville, bought a third of a sawmill, piloted rafts on the Wisconsin River, farmed in Minnesota, and taught school and traveled through Kansas, Missouri and Iowa.

A brother of George and Archie, Daniel, was born in 1851 in New York. He came to Grand Rapids and invested in a cranberry marsh. He left for the West and was never heard from again.

In 1879, George moved up to take over Daniel's cranberry bogs.

George never married but lived with the Archie McMillan family: Maggie, Mary and Anna. He suffered from exposure-induced rheumatic fever in the war and it led to a heart ailment from which he succumbed on Oct. 24, 1925.

Upon his death, George had items of value:

Ten shares of Rood Construction, $500; 13.6 shares of Ahdawagham, $680; seven shares of Prentiss-Wabers, $875; 20 shares of Wisconsin Rapids Street Railway, $1,000; mortgage bonds, Pfister Vogel Leather Co., $2,000.

Also, 20 shares of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Co., $2,600; Liberty bonds, $5,000; Ahdawagham Paper Products bonds, $5,000; Nekoosa Edwards bonds, $9,000; C.W.P. &P. Co. bonds, $10,300; and 300 shares of C.W.P.&P. Co., $37,500.

The total value of George's estate was $76,602.20.

Beneficiaries were the Congregational Church, Riverview Hospital and Northland Academy.

Street railway stock and cash went to "adopted daughter" Anna. Ahdawagham and Prentiss Wabers went to "adopted daughter" Mary.

The two girls acknowledged receipt of $57,050.77.

Anna McMillan

Daughter of Archie and Maggie McMillan, Anna was born February 21, 1881.

She graduated from Centralia High School in 1897, attended Stevens Point Normal and Stout Institute, and received her degree from Columbia University.

Anna organized the first home economics department in Wisconsin Rapids, taught algebra at Ashland and Marinette, and headed the textiles and clothing department of Lewis Institute, Chicago, and Stout.

After her retirement, Anna came back to Wisconsin Rapids, where she served many civic organizations, including the board of the T.B. Scott Library. She resided here until her death July 30, 1957.

Anna left items of value:

150 shares of Wisconsin Rapids Building and Loan, $15,000; $17,500 in land; 425 shares of Nekoosa Edwards, $19,975; cash, $39,205; ITT stock, $77,069; 32,252 shares of Consolidated Papers Inc., $1,144,946.

Also, a gold watch, $10; one share of Wood County Telephone, $100; and minor investments in Nash Kelvinator, U.S. Bonds and U.S. Steel.

Half of Anna's $1,392,415,78 estate went to Northland College because of its affiliation with the Congregational Church. Northland's Anna McMillan Hall was built at a cost of $400,000.

Other recipients were Riverview Hospital, Forest Hill Cemetery, First Congregational Church and T.B. Scott Library.

The rest went to Anna's sister, Mary.

Mary McMillan Burt

Mary graduated from Centralia High School (1894), Stevens Point Normal (1898) and the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1903, B.S.; 1914, M.A.).

She taught math in Wisconsin Rapids, Ashland and Marshfield, headed the River Falls college math department (1920-25) and taught at St. Peterburg, Fla. junior college, returning to Wisconsin Rapids in 1925.

For 25 years, Mary served on the T.B. Scott Library Board.

In 1942, she married Laertes "Art" Burt of St. Petersburg and moved there. Burt died in 1966.

On January 5, 1966, Mary wrote to Dr. Lee Pomainville that she was considering turning over some "securities" to be used for a library building in Wisconsin Rapids.

On February 22, she explained:

"My idea, rather the idea I worked over with Mr. Theodore Brazeau over a period of years, was to provide for the South Wood County Historical Society in plans for the museum."

The library gift was announced May 10, 1966:

Mary had placed in trust, with attorney Richard Brazeau, 16,000 shares of CPI stock worth more than $500,000 to build a library as a memorial to her parents, Archie and Margaret, and to her uncle, George.

It was stipulated that the building be in the present location, that room be allocated for the South Wood County Historical Corp. and that a small auditorium be included.

On June 20, 1968, ground was broken. The new library opened April 6, 1970, with Mary present.

Besides Mary's gift, Emily Bell had provided 1,000 shares of CPI stock, the city issued bonds for $570,000, and a federal grant was obtained for $220,000.

Landscaping was paid for by Mrs. Bell. Nekoosa Edwards donated furniture and equipment, and Mary provided an additional $6,000 for a memorial lounge area in memory of her husband, Laertes Burt.

The South Wood County Historical Corp. originally meant to share the library building but instead was given the former T.B. Scott Library building at 540 3rd St. S., an arrangement that pleased Mary.

Above: Mary McMillan Burt, Margaret McCourt, head librarian Edith Dudgeon and Clifford Ryan. Left; Mayor Donald Penza, Ira Boyce, Margaret McCourt, Emily Baldwin Bell, Edith Dudgeon, Mary McMillan Burt, George Mead.

Much of the credit for the building of McMillan Memorial Library must go to Richard Brazeau, said Margaret McCourt, who then chaired the library board's building committee.

"He was on the board and he knew there would be money left for a library in the will," said Mrs. McCourt. "His father had apparently done the wills of both sisters.

"We had outgrown the library on 3rd Street. We would argue, 'What are we going to do?'

"'Now don't get excited. You're going to get it,'" he would say.

"Finally, he asked Mary if she would be willing to give us enough money to go ahead and build it and not wait."

Brazeau died before the building was completed but "Mary Burt told me many times how happy she was that she had done it while she was alive to see it," said Mrs. McCourt.

Despite her earlier generosity, Mary had items of value at her death, a total estate of $840,000 that was dispensed in the following manner:

$5,000 for a math scholarship and 2,000 shares of CPI to River Falls College, $2,000 to the Pine River Congregational Church, $3,000 to the Mary McMillan Burt Mathematical Award, St. Petersburg Junior College.

Also, 200 shares of ATT to the Friends of St. Petersburg Library, 1,000 shares of CPI to Forest Hill Cemetery, 1,000 shares of CPI to a Wisconsin foundation for cancer research, 1,000 shares of CPI to the First Congregational Church here to maintain the Anna McMillan Educational Building, 1,000 shares of CPI to Riverview Hospital.

Also, 2,000 shares of CPI to Northland College, 1,000 shares of CPI to the Chicago Theological Seminary, 3,000 shares of CPI to McMillan library and 1,000 shares of CPI to the South Wood County Historical Corp.

"This is my home town," she had written. "Anything which contributes to the progress of the city in any way is, and has always been, of real interest to me."

Of McMillan Memorial Library, Mary McMillan Burt said:

"It is truly Everyman's College, the repository of records of the achievements of man through the ages, there for the use of any citizen."

The Virtue of Uselessness

What I like about a church is its uselessness.

A church is one of the few buildings our people can be persuaded to put up that will not generate a profit but rather demand a sacrifice.

A church exists to look good and provide a place where people of like belief may gather to share those beliefs. Many leave feeling richer for the experience though lighter of pocket.

A church, if well conceived and constructed, becomes a work of art. Consider the church on this page. It was designed and constructed in the Puritan tradition. Nothing, believed the Puritans, should come between the worshiper and his god—no priest, no pope, no panoply of plaster icons. It is purposely unadorned. The windows present no images.

The design is based on classical features imitating Greek and Roman temples. Besides being popular at the time, the style suggests a subdued rationality rather than an impressionable romanticism. The builders believed in idealistic thought. The simplicity and ascetic aestheticism suggest that what magic moves us must come from something other than appurtenances.

Built in 1864-65 by Congregationalists under their first minister, J.W. Harris, and used until 1900, the building was purchased and remodeled by the Christian Scientists who continue to worship there. It is the oldest church building in Wisconsin Rapids.

On its original lot, the Christian Science church speaks besides itself as a remnant of the village once clustered not at the entrance to the Grand Avenue Bridge but around the sawmills that once occupied the site in which now rests the East Side swimming pool. Inside, rows of dark, wooden pews suggest the common mission of those who occupied them. I can name a few who have sat here before our century: Susan B. Anthony (feminist), H.B. Philleo (poet), Judge Henry Hayden (adulterer), W.H. Cochran (killer), Frank Wood (banker), Jack Brundage (journalist), George McMillan (entrepreneur), Ralph Worthington (merchant), Frank Garrison (industrialist) and John Rablin (pioneer).

Even more when it is vacant of parson and person does a sense of pagan, primitive wonder emerge from the old church. This is where folks nearly as common as us wanted to be tickled by whispers from the spirit world. Not satisfied with being human only, the churchgoers strove for higher, mystical elements that were part of themselves and, at the same time, came from a greater other. Not content with being mortal, they have put up a monument that itself seems to be eternal. Not happy to be alone, they joined as a congregation, hoping, in this humble structure, to have taken a place closer to the seat of the Almighty.

Otto Drug Store

Northeast corner of West Grand Avenue and Third Avenue prior to River Block

Home Church Christmas

When I think of a church at Christmas, it often is of an old wooden church in a smaller town than this—the fundamentalist Evangelical United Brethren home church of my father and mother.

My impression of the building itself is of a simple, steepled structure more humble than the Christian Science church shown on the preceding page.

I remember stained-glass windows donated "in loving memory of" and hard wooden pews in which the same people sat the same place every time I saw them, which was every time I went. Missing church on Sunday was unthinkable if not actually sinful.

It was not as clear to me then as it now is that the speech and demeanor of the parishioners is determined by their being German. The white foreheads and rough hands tell me clearly, though, that they are farmers who work almost all the time, who abide close to earth and animals. The men and boys often smell of manure and silage, having been to the barn Sunday morning, as every morning, for chores. They wear the same simple, gray suits they always have worn.

A few are strangers to me. Many belong to my own family of uncles and aunts, cousins and grandparents. Others are elderly men and women I often meet at the church, whose relationship to me is obscure. They seem to be from another time. Some are children I don't really know.

Many of the Brethren are as strict as my own relatives. There is to be no drinking, no smoking and no card-playing. Social life seems to be a matter of restrained if good-humored sobriety. It's early to bed, early to rise.

Normally, we visit the old church by day but, at Christmas, we go at night.

On the snowy drive in from the farm, Mom leads carols, such as "Silent Night" and "Oh Holy Night." Alighting from Grandpa's Hudson at the church, Mom and Dad happily greet friends and family from way back when they too, lived here.

Young and old show genuine enthusiasm. For the children, there are treats to come. For the parents, the burden of husbandry has lifted. A more peaceful occupation shows in their faces.

The sanctuary has changed, too. With other lights dimmed, modest Christmas ornamentation and a tree have appeared. Figures on the windows reflect red and green light from within. An organist plays soft Christmas melodies rather than the more strident hymns of Sunday.

From somewhere on the left, I watch as darkness comes over the room and angels appear, their wings of gilt cardboard and their coat-hanger halos just as amazing as feathers or fins.

Other children of farmers have changed into bathrobes. They carry staffs and wands, and have adopted a new tongue, speaking in terms like "behold" and "glad tidings" and "a king is born."

In the old church, among people who normally don't encourage a lot of fooling around, these children have got up to put on a show. To the little boy in the dark, it is more than prestidigitation.

Sesquicentennial

"Sesquicentennial" enters our vocabulary as 150th anniversaries of local institutions arrive. SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church has marked its sesquicentennial Sunday.

Remarks by an early Catholic, John B. Grignon, reprinted in "The Progress of Half a Century" (1907), depict the pioneer condition in 1837.

"My parents came here the summer of 1829 and located at what we call the 'Grignon Bends,' about five miles below Nekoosa, in Adams County. I was born March 28, 1837, and claim to be the first white child born on the Wisconsin River north of Portage City.

"When my parents settled here, there was nothing at Grand Rapids, nor north from there the whole length of the river, but Indians."

"My parents were pretty strict Catholics and did not care to leave me until fall, when a priest would come, so they took me down the Wisconsin River and portaged at Portage City on the Fox River and went down the Fox River to Little Chute, where Father Van den Bruck had built a church, and where I was baptised," said Grignon.

SSPP 1907

In 1837, Father Van den Broeck, then of St. John's Church, Green Bay, traveled by way of horseback or canoe, carrying his portable altar stone and saying the first known Mass in what is now Wisconsin Rapids.

In the frontier community, there was no "parish" in the modern sense. Mrs. John McTavish, born in 1857 to Mr. and Mrs. Michael Matthews, recalled in 1937 the early years of the church, when Mass was celebrated in her family's log cabin, seven miles from town, and in the homes of such families as the Matthews, McDonalds, McCamleys and Keoughs.

Mrs. McTavish said it was the custom to eat breakfast at the hosts' house to avoid "a mighty uncomfortable wait—it took so long to get back home!"

Other early parishioners were French-Canadians surnamed Cotey, LaBreche, Trudell, Arpin, Dugas, Lefebvre, Chevelier, VerBunker, Grignon, Rocheleau, Corriveau, Borgeron, Homier and Voyer—and Irish: McGrath, Hurley, Herron, Meehan, McRaith and O'Day.

Van den Broeck visited Grand Rapids/Centralia at least once a year until 1850, when that responsibility was given to the Rev. Anton Godhardt of St. Mary's Church, Portage.

There followed a succession of missionary pastors and parish ministers. In 1854, Rev. Louis Dael of St. Joseph's, Fond du Lac, built a 20-by 30-foot frame church on 3rd Avenue in what was then Centralia. The land was donated by J.B. Marcotte.

Father E.A. Godfert, St. Mary's Church, Green Lake County, served in 1856 and 1857.

In 1857, the Rev. James Stehle became the first priest to actually live at Centralia/Grand Rapids. In spring of that year, the original building was destroyed by fire. According to Capt. Joseph Cotey,

the fire was caused by evergreens used to trim the church.

The Catholic population in Grand Rapids, across the river, had grown enough that a new location was selected on 2nd Street North property donated by Francis Biron, "a good, rich and generous Canadian," according to a later account.

Father James, or "Jacobus," Stehle began the building of the new church. In 1857, he baptized John Mullen, Honora Mathews (later Mrs. McTavish), Edward Burns, William Duprine and others named Ruffiant, Lesage, Blanchette, Charbonneau, Payette, Bergeron, Sainville and McShea.

Stehle was succeeded by his brother, the Rev. R.N. Stehle, the same year. Church records show R.N. Stehle performing baptisms in 1858.

The interior of the church was completed under the pastorate of Father A.J. David, who arrived in 1859. A small residence was erected.

After David's removal, Rev. Dael performed baptisms in 1861. Rev. M. Hens came in 1861 and remained until 1864. The next pastor, Father J. Spierings, stayed only nine months, after which Stevens Point had to provide a minister temporarily. In 1866, Father R.N. Stehle returned but died a few months later.

The Rev. John Gleason, or Gleeson, served from 1867 to 1869, during which time another church building was begun. Gleason was removed in favor of the Rev. Joseph McDonald, who was removed in 1871. Again, the church was attended from Stevens Point.

In December 1871, a zealous young French Canadian priest, the Rev. Francis Tanguay, took Grand Rapids as his first charge.

"This edifice was commenced some two years since," wrote the Wood County Reporter on Aug. 15, 1872, of the new church. "But, owing to the stringent condition of the money market, it has remained partially builded till now, the present pastor of the society having taken the matter in charge and dilligently labored to successfully accomplish what, but for his energy, would have remained unfinished, perhaps for years. The society is fortunate in having secured so thorough and energetic a man as Father Tonguay."

The church was dedicated June 29, 1873.

The Nov. 13, 1873, Wood County Reporter noted that Antoine Arpin

Mrs. Glen Daly

moved the old Catholic church from 2nd Street North to a lot just north of the 1st National Bank. "Its huge form slowly crowded along the street all last week, and we wondered why Antoine didn't float it after getting it below the Rablin House. Certainly, the street was a magnificent canal.

Tanguay was succeeded by the Rev. William De Kelver, until 1875, when Father Peter Pernin, a French speaker, arrived. He stayed at Grand Rapids for three years.

In 1875, the St. John Baptiste Society of French Canadians was organized and flourished for 14 years. In 1878, Pernin built a church at Rudolph.

During Pernin's tenure, the Rapids church was struck by lightning and damaged severly.

The Rev. Charles Beyerle, a convert to the Catholic faith, came in 1878, to preside for 19 years.

A fire in February 1880 threatened to destroy the church, but it was saved by the Centralia and Grand Rapids fire departments, Grand Rapids being able to use its new fire engine, and railroad workers on the Green Bay and Western bridge assisting by cutting a hole in the ice for the hose.

Convent, School, Parsonage

In 1886, a Catholic school was opened in the parsonage and placed in charge of the Notre Dame Sisters of Milwaukee. Another residence was purchased for Beyerle. In 1895, a new school was built.

Branches of the Catholic Knights of Wisconsin (1880) and Catholic Order of Foresters (1895) were instituted.

Beyerle died in office on July 19, 1897.

During the pastorate of the Rev. W.F. Van Roosmalen (1897-1904), extensive repairs were made, and a new rectory was built.

As the city of Grand Rapids and its Catholic population expanded, other churches were established out of the original. In 1904, Polish Catholics withdrew from the original church, SS. Peter & Paul, and organized St. Lawrence Polish Catholic Church on the West Side.

The Rev. B. Hugenroth succeeded Van Roosmalen in 1904.

In the spring of 1905, Grand Rapids became part of the Diocese of La Crosse. The Rev. William Reding was appointed to SS. Peter & Paul on July 1, 1907. Pastors and assistants following him are not listed here.

In 1947, some West Side Catholics belonging to SS. Peter & Paul withdrew and formed Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic parish.

The 1873 SS. Peter & Paul church building was replaced by the present structure, designed by A.F. Billmeyer and Son, and dedicated Nov. 25, 1951.

Another parish was formed from the SS. Peter & Paul congregation in 1956, when St. Vincent de Paul organized on what was then the lower southeast side of the city.

The pastor at SS. Peter & Paul during the latest score years of the sesquicentennial has been the Rev. Andrew K. Karoblis.

Class of 1916

Pictured from left are (front row) Carl Billmeyer, unidentified, Monsignor Reding, Prudence Martin, Alvin VanAlstine and Bernadine Brown; (second row) Henrietta Nash, Art Lemense, Clara Bengert, Fairfax Dunigan, Helen Rantz, Franklin Love, Margaret Dunigan, John Caseman, Philip Nobles and Clara Geisler; (third row) John Schlatterer, Alice Damon, George Reiland, Helen Chandos, Leonard Link, Ruth Boles, Glen Berard, Lela Peltier, Glen Daly and Gladys Grant; (top row) unidentified, Leo Fahl, Elizabeth White and Agnes Bauer.

Sisters of Notre Dame

Catholic education celebrates 100 years in Wisconsin Rapids with the centennial of SS. Peter and Paul parish this year.

On Sept. 14, 1886, three sisters of the Notre Dame teaching order and a candidate arrived at the train station about a mile from the convent. They were met by two young ladies who brought them to Father Beyerle. Although he was quite ill at the time, Beyerle showed the sisters around.

Sister Calliopa (the superintendent), Sister Almira, Sister Cunern and candidate Bridget Mangan viewed their convent, the remodeled former rectory. Two classrooms, a kitchen and refectory were on the first floor. Bedrooms, a community room and a combination music room/parlor were upstairs.

For the first few nights, Bridget slept on the floor in the community room. There were only four beds and Venerable Mother Bonoventura, from Milwaukee, had come to help open the mission. Besides the four beds, there were counted three washstands, one washbowl, three washdishes and other utensils.

School began on Sept. 16 with 60 pupils, "quite a miracle for the two rooms were without benches," according to anecdotes quoted from the sisters' records.

On Oct. 11, another classroom opened. Now there were 87 students. When school closed in May, the new school had 120 pupils from 6 to 16 years of age.

A new, four-room school was completed in 1895 to accommodate increasing enrollment. In 1913, two rooms were added and, in 1924, four more rooms. Before the new rooms could be occupied, however, the old building in front was destroyed, on Dec. 24, by fire.

In order to keep the school in operation, some classes were held at Lowell School. Two classes were held in the hall of the addition.

The front section was replaced in 1925, at a cost of $100,000, and still is in use. One feature especially pleased the nun in charge of the records. "New gym!" she wrote.

"The 11-room school offers its pupils the advantage of a gymnasium-auditorium, which is located at the south end of the building," reads a later description.

A Nov. 23, 1951, newspaper counted 14 sisters (13 faculty and a housekeeper) serving a school of 600. Sister Mary Laurentia was sister superior. All teachers had earned college degrees. One lay teacher supplemented the clergy.

The nuns lived in a two-story brick building to the rear of the old church. It was built in 1931 to replace a former sisters' home, which was moved across the street and converted into two family residences.

All grade rooms were equipped with radios. Through this medium, the children took part in the "Let's Draw" and music programs of the Wisconsin School of the Air.

Since 1951, the interior of the school has been extensively remodeled (1968-73) and equipped with computers, copiers and other necessaries of modern education.

Christmas Conflagration

When SS. Peter and Paul School broke out in fire early on Christmas Eve day of 1924, minus 12-degree cold and a high degree of misfortune on the part of the local fire department made for some excitement on 2nd Street North.

At 5:45 a.m., janitor Henry Hess sounded the alarm to the city fire department. Flames had broken through the floor and walls near the main entrance to the building, just completed by contractor A.F. Billmeyer.

Firemen rushed to the scene, attached hoses to hydrants and aimed. But the hydrants had frozen. When water was found, hoses broke, wetting the firemen, who soon were covered with ice. Meanwhile, flames spread rapidly between the brick outer wall and the wooden inner wall. Attempts to raise ladders to the second floor were futile; the ladders were too short.

After an hour of fighting the fire, during which firemen suffered from frozen hands and faces, a second alarm was turned in, requesting aid from volunteer firefighters.

Scores of local citizens answered the second call and relieved the weary firemen, who returned to their posts after a short respite. Fire Chief A.C. Miller, who had been ill, had answered the first call but retired after a few hours.

To protect the new addition, firefighters entered and fought the advance of the flames from positions inside. The defective hose broke inside the building and considerable damage was done before the water could be turned off. However, sisters and children united in sweeping and bailing the water from the various floors, saving most of the woodwork. They also were able to carry out almost all textbooks.

After breaking through the roof, the flames threatened Father William Reding's residence next door, but constant streams of water kept that building from catching fire.

The insured loss was considered in the neighborhood of $20,000, although replacement by a similar building was estimated to cost more like $60,000. Defective wiring was blamed for the fire.

St. Philomena's

As Mother Bonaventure, Sisters Mary De Deo and Mary Arno, and candidate Mary Gaspard stepped from the train at Rudolph station in May 1886, the Rev. August Van Sever rejoiced. The three sisters for the new Mission of St. Philomena and the Blessed Virgin had arrived.

A school had been opened the previous year with some 50 pupils but no teachers. In order to obtain nuns for teachers, Van Sever had sacrificed his home in the school building for use as a convent, moving himself to the sacristy.

Van Sever, at Rudolph since 1884, drove the sisters west two miles and south one-half mile to where the 6-year-old church stood on a hill overlooking the cutover.

The sisters stepped down and saw a new church bell still on the platform in front of the church. The following week, the bell would be suspended in the tower and, for the first time, the Angelus heard in the township of Rudolph.

When the sisters arrived, Van Sever's housekeeper and another woman of the congregation were preparing breakfast for the group. After a noon lunch with Van Sever, the new nuns went to look about the house and make themselves at home.

They found upstairs a dormitory in which were only one washbowl and two beds. All used the same washbowl. Mother Bonaventure and Sister De Deo slept in one bed, Sister Arno and Mary Gaspard in the other. Two days later were added another bed, washstand, washbowl, washboiler, pitcher, bureau and "other little things." An organ came later that year.

In 1887, a house for the sisters was built and blessed at the reopening of school on the first Monday in September. In this period, there normally were between 50 and 100 students.

The unveiling of the Blessed Virgin's statue took place wtih great solemnity in May 1898. The sisters were surprised by a Sacred Heart statue on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In December, three small statues were purchased for the chapel. "The man let us have all three for $9.00," wrote the recording sister. "Rev. Van Sever paid half."

Indeed, Van Sever often contributed from his own pocket. "December, the coal being so dear on account of the strikes," wrote a nun in 1900, "Rev. Father Van Sever paid the coal for this year."

The priest's educational effort proved successful as many former students achieved certificates from various teachers' colleges. They included, from 1897 to 1900, Rose Ratelle, Beatrice Ratelle, Lydia Rayome, "the 2 Miss Fogartys," Celia Vadnais, Almira Blain, Francis Slattery, Francis Reinhart, Laura Provost and Kate Sweeney.

Attendance at the school rose to more than 100 in the new century that opened with midnight Mass and Holy Communion.

In 1903, Van Sever bought the sisters a new steel range cooking stove, linoleum for the parlor, cupboards for schoolrooms, music room, hall and sacristy, a new floor in the school room and new walls in the chapel. Mr. Ragan, the Grand Rapids undertaker, donated three dining chairs.

Pete Lamers, Father August Van Sever, John Krommenakker

Van Sever was presented with a purse and a Seth Thomas clock on June 5, 1904, on the 20th anniversary of his arrival in Rudolph.

As the sisters celebrated the Feast of St. Philomena on July 11, 1904, a fire broke out at Mr. Compton's house opposite the church. The sisters hurried to ring the church bell to call the neighbors, "who responded with all possible haste." In a few minutes, the building was in flames and the wind so strong that five-inch cinders were carried by the wind for miles.

"As the wind was blowing strongly towards our house and church," wrote the sister, "we have great reason to be thankful to good St. Philomena for her protection. The only thing that was burned was that one protestant house—the only one around here.

The first graduate of St. Philomena's to die was Miss Almira Blain, on July 12, 1904, though she had promised that if she recovered from illness, she would never miss any Mass that she could possibly attend. "The Sodality, dressed in white, marched in procession in front of the funeral to the church and to the cemetery. Her people had over 70 masses said for her.

While waiting for Sister Alban O'Reilly to arrive, replacing Sister Olive Ryan in 1905, sisters Clement and Servitia gave the place a thorough house cleaning, including painting of floors and doors in the house and school. "When all was in apple-pie order, floods of rain poured down from a defective new roof, destroying the entire work and taking away all ambition for futher repairs of the kind."

At a 1908 Feast of the Transfiguration, a sister said, "It is the first time we could renew our vows together. Let us say an 'Our Father' that God will permit our deceased mother to be present." As soon as the praying began, a light appeared like a sky rocket, advancing slowly from the east in a horizontal line until it stood over the church and disappeared.

On May 6, 1910, feastday of St. John the Evangelist, student John O'Reilly, trustee John Kromenaker and neighbor John Morgan began digging a cellar for the new cement bungalow for the sisters.

In 1911, O'Reilly became a priest and gave his first Holy Communion to the sisters of St. Philomena. "The church was most beautifully decorated for the occasion by draperies of delicate cheese-cloth, light green and cream. Large branches of orange blossoms and spruce were planted in barrels of water outside."

June 1915 brought the "saddest event of our lives" to the sisters of Rudolph's St. Philomena. Their happy little family was broken up. "They'll all carry a fond remembrance of the blessed time spent there and of the kindness of their ever-faithful friend, Rev. A. Van Sever." Three new sisters were sent to take the place of the departed.

Another major change took place in 1917 as, in July, Van Sever left Rudolph to become a professor at St. John's Atonement College in New York state.

For 33 years, the generous Belgian priest had served St. Philomena. In his place was to come an even more munificent ecclesiastic.

St. Philomena School, Looking North, 1909

Seneca Corners

The centennial of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Seneca means 100 years of church history. It also suggests more than a century of German heritage.

On what is now the Knutson place, north of Highway 13, near Seneca Corners, reposes the old German "Griesbach Cemetery," so named because it had been planted on Griesbach's farm. "I remember when they used that cemetery," said Hulda Johnson. "I used to go and fix up my brother, Daniel Koch's, grave after a while."

Many gravestones in the Griesbach cemetery are dated previous to any area church: Frederick Griesbach, d. Sept. 6, 1876; Anna Leu, d. 1876; Hana Beske, d. March 27, 1881; Daniel Koch, d. 1885; Maude and Charles Hackbarth, 1883. The newest grave appears to be that of John F. Leu, June 30, 1904.

This cemetery soon would be superceded as more Germans moved into the area. A history written in 1970 by William Ehlert describes the background of his immigrant grandfather, Frederick.

The strong military buildup of King Frederick William IV of Prussia and consequent conscription of every able-bodied boy, along with the promise of greater economic opportunity in America, caused many to want to leave the land of beer and schnaaps for the land of milk and honey.

Fritz Ehlert arrived in New York in 1865. For several years, he lived in Brookfield, then a rural community, where he worked as a teamster in summer and a woodsman in winter.

As his friends located in Wood County, where land was cheap and available, Ehlert decided to move there, too. By 1870, he had purchased, from John Meyer, land on which years ago had been built a sawmill. Ehlert's family of five moved in with Meyer until a log home was built the following year. The old saw mill was used to house the few cattle and horses.

It was 102 years ago that German farmers, such as Ehlert, began to worship together at Bean School, and a century ago that they formally organized a Lutheran church at Seneca Corners (eight miles northwest of Wisconsin Rapids on Highway 13.) The mastermind was the "father of Lutheranism in Wood County," Rev. F. Leyhe of Kellner, according to a 50th anniversary history of St. Paul's. Leyhe also founded churches in Wisconsin Rapids, Kellner and the town of Sigel.

Even before the church was in place, land for a cemetery that replaced the Griesbach plot was purchased.

On Oct. 31, 1887, a church was formally organized and named "St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation." The charter members were: August Keup, Peter Bohmsach, John Zieher, Carl Behling, Henry Otto, Ferdinand Staven, William Lienke, August Drabe, William Seehjagen, Michael Hirsch, Herman Zager, William Haak, Julius Marx, William Wolf, Gustav Wessenberg and Carl Fandrich. Dressen, Kissinger, Mueller, Leu and Ehlert are other German names mentioned in early church records.

During the pastorate of Leyhe, the congregation was served from Kellner. Later, ministers came from Sigel, Pittsville and Arpin.

About a year after organization, a church building was erected, which is now the greater part of the present building. A tower and small addition were placed on the front of the church circa 1906.

The first baptism at St. Paul's was of Martha Behling by Leyhe in 1886. The eighth baptism, in 1891, was of Johanna Hulda Koch, now Hulda Johnson, with whom I spoke some time ago. She was born July 16, 1891, on a 40-acre farm slightly northeast of Seneca Corners in the town of Sigel. Before he was married, her father, Daniel Koch, had immigrated from Germany "to get the bare land."

Her mother, Anna Gunkel, also came over unmarried from Germany. She saw Koch crossing "the river bridge" and thought he looked like a nice man, said Mrs. Johnson.

Herr Koch and Freulein Gunkel were married, had 11 children and spent their lives farming. "Dad grew hay for the cows, and corn and wheat," she said. "We worked, I tell you. We had a big wagon and team, and we had to go along and pick rocks up on the ground and put them on the wagon. We kids had to pick weeds. Mother

used to take butter and meat that we had butchered to town and sell to the ladies of Rapids."

Among the hard-working Teutons, gemutlichkeit was not altogether lacking, however. Neighborhood dances were in the Koch home. "Somebody would play the fiddle or accordian, and we would square dance or waltz or two-step," said Hulda. She spoke German as a child, and all of her neighbors were Germans, she said. She went to a German school at Seneca Corners before she went to "English school."

William Ehlert, in his autobiography, said confirmation instruction, until 1917, was in the German language administered by Rev. Gieselman from Sigel.

Attempting to master German in an English-speaking environment brought forth memorable linguistic lapses. Ehlert recalled one boy who, when asked to produce the sixth commandment, wrote; "Du soldst nicht eier brechen." The correct translation would have been, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Instead, the unfortunate novice had elicited a directive with even more ambiguous ramifications when he wrote, "Thou shalt not break eggs."

Mrs. Iola Ehlert

Gus Dressen family, Seneca Corners

Liberace's Stepmother

Zona Leu
English

Gamma Sigma, II, III, IV, Orchestra, IV
Instrumental Trio, IV; Class Pres., III
Ahdawagham Staff, IV.

"Her every footstep has music in it,
as she comes up the stairs"

At a concert, Liberace looked two rows from him and saw his father sitting with a woman cellist from the Milwaukee Symphony. "It turned out she had been his mistress for years. I was terribly, terribly hurt," Liberace said in the Oct. 4, 1982, issue of People magazine.

The father, Salvatore Liberace was a French horn and trumpet player who had performed with the Milwaukee Philharmonic Orchestra and John Philip Sousa. During the 1920s, he made a living playing in orchestras that accompanied silent films. A musical purist, Salvatore refused to play with dance bands and found himself unemployed during the Depression.

Because of his musical standards, Salvatore also walked out of a particularly flamboyant concert by Lee, later shouting, according to the Feb. 17, 1987, issue of the National Enquirer, "You're an imposter! You're not my son!"

It was Salvatore's wife, Frances Zuchowski Liberace, who ran a grocery to support the family of four children, including Walter or Wladziu, born May 16, 1919, and known later as Lee.

But who was that cellist, unnamed by People magazine?

In Milwaukee, on April 16, 1904, a daughter was born to Irving Bradshaw, a 56-year-old glove maker, and his wife, 31-year-old Edith Mau Bradshaw. The name Zona Gale Bradshaw was chosen in honor of the Portage writer, Zona Gale. After Irving's death, Edith took Zona with her to Otto J. Leu's farm at Altdorf, where Mrs. Bradshaw was employed as housekeeper.

Leu had been Wood County superintendent of schools, real estate agent, county-board and school-board member, insurance salesman and president of the Central Wisconsin Holstein-Friesian Association. He had been married June 28, 1899, to Luella Lewis, who died May 27, 1913. Their son, Earle, was born June 4, 1901.

On June 24, 1914, Otto Leu and Edith Bradshaw were married. Their family included Otto's son, Earle, and Edith's daughter, Zona, whom Leu adopted. On Aug. 9, 1916, a daughter, Madeline, was born.

The Leus lived just north of the present Altdorf farm of George Huser. Zona attended a little red schoolhouse still in existence, said former schoolmate Josephine Arnold Rokus.

In 1918, the Leu family moved to Wisconsin Rapids, in order to allow Edith and her daughters closer access to culture. "We were 12 when we met," said Gladys Plenke Laramie. "I was the chatterbox. Zona was the silent one."

The two high school freshmen were challenged by Principal Julius Winden.

"Do you know how you can get my goat?" Winden asked. "Just watch where I tie it."

"He stood up with horns and pointed," said Mrs. Laramie. "Zona and I were his special students after that."

When it came time to sign up for band instruments, Gladys brought a school-owned cello home. When her father told her to take it back, Gladys offered the cello to Zona.

"Honest? Honest!?" Zona was thrilled.

In high school, the brown-eyed freckled and petite Zona did not show emotion often. A serious student, she practiced her cello for hours. She did not date, party or go out at night. That she smiled

when she received a gold medal was considered worth notice. "We all tried to live up to her," said Gladys. "She was a great inspiration to me—true, honest, meticulous."

Emeline Hughes Eastman was two years ahead of Zona in school. The two girls had taken piano lessons from the same teacher, Eva Lindville. They also both attended the Methodist Church in Wisconsin Rapids. Emeline dated Zona's brother, Earle, a few times and spent overnights with Zona, the two talking long into the night.

Mr. Leu, said Emeline, was the rugged type. "The rest were very arty—anything but country people."

Zona played piano at the time, including duets with Emeline. "Her entire life was music. Her talents brought her to the forefront. I enjoyed her very much," said Emeline.

"She used to drive me crazy, practicing all the time," said Zona's sister, Madeline, now living in Milwaukee.

Upon Zona's graduation as Lincoln High School Class of '23 valedictorian, the family moved to Milwaukee, where Zona could obtain futher instruction in music. Edith Leu doted on Zona, said Emeline. "She had a big desire to see her go places."

Zona enrolled at the Layton School of Art, Milwaukee, and the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. Her cello teachers were Willy Schmidt and Alois Smrz. With Smrz and others, Zona traveled, in 1925, to the Prague Conservatory of Music, Czechoslovakia, for futher study financed by Leu. While Zona was in Europe, her stepfather died, on June 24, 1926.

Zona's 1928 marriage to Smrz was a happy one. His death in 1932 troubled Zona greatly. She apparently was married again soon, this time to a "Russian" whose identity is not known. The marriage lasted only a short time.

Zona became a cellist of some renown, playing in the Milwaukee Philharmonic and its successor, the Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra. She also taught at Milwaukee colleges.

In 1953, as Gladys Laramie boarded a train at Clear Lake, someone put out a foot to stop her.

"Glady Plenke, How are you?"

"Zona Gale Leu!"

("She would get mad when I'd call her Zona Gale, " recalled Gladys.)

"I want you to meet my husband, Sam," said Zona.

Sam was Salvatore Liberace, a roundish, short, mostly bald, seemingly robust Italian, nearly a quarter century older than frail Zona.

Although her health had begun to fail, Zona appeared joyous with her husband. She showed Gladys a picture of Sam with his cornet.

"We made beautiful music together," Zona said. "That's why we decided to get married."

"So you're stepmother to Liberace, said Gladys.

"Never say that," answered Zona. "He's got a mother. He doesn't recognize me."

It had been a mutual interest in music and such mutual friends as Al Smrz that brought Zona and Sam together. Following Sam's divorce from Frances, he and Zona were married, in 1943. Lee, at odds with his father and in sympathy with his mother, did not approve of the marriage and is not believed to have assisted Sam and Zona financially.

After a short time in Marshall, Sam and Zona moved on to the Madison Symphony Orchestra. Her arthritis, however, precluded much of a music career there, and she turned to the making of ceramics.

Zona's mother, Edith Bradshaw Leu, died on Memorial Day 1959. In 1961, Sam and Zona moved to San Francisco, to be close to Sam's sons, George and Lee, and his daughter, Angie. Zona began painting and exhibiting her work in California.

While Zona lived in a San Francisco apartment, Lee visited fairly often, according to Madeline, to enjoy his dad's cooking. Lee also sent Zona flowers while she was in the hospital prior to her death—at age 66 in San Francisco, May 23, 1970.

Zona Gale Liberace, whose own music still stirs a few here in River City.

Emma Harroun
Rough Country

Out picking blueberries with her mother near their Waukesha County home, Emma Moody smelled smoke. It got so dense that her eyes smarted. Something surprisingly far away was burning—Vesper, Wisconsin.

The year was 1894. Four-year-old Emma lived at North Prairie in an old hotel her grandfather owned.

When Emma's father, Lewis Winfield Moody, mortgaged his farm and lost it a couple years later, he must have remembered the smell of Vesper's blaze with some affection; upon the urging of his brother, Will, already up in the pinery, L.W. Moody and George Roberts built a covered wagon, hooked up a team, and headed for Wood County.

Then Emma got typhoid fever. Her mother, Lisetta Treutel Moody, wrote to Aunt Lena and L.W. up at Vesper that Emma wasn't expected to live. "Pa dropped everything and came home," Emma Moody Layton Harroun said. "After I was well enough, they rented one of those big boxcars and loaded all our stuff into it and we moved. Emma was 7.

While a small two-story house was being built that winter, the Moodys lived with relatives in an old logging camp. One side, Emma said, had bunks for the lumberjacks. The other side had a kitchen and a dining room with a long table.

In their new house, Emma's family lived a mile and a half northwest of Vesper on what is now Highway 186. Her father ran a saw at the Vesper mill. "It was awful rough country. They had to clear the land," said Emma. "They'd take those big logs and skid them up. Some they cut into cordwood and took down to the mile-long pile at the switch for the train to take to Rapids. Basswood they made into barrel staves."

On a dark and stormy night when the wolves howled louder than usual, Emma's brothers, Charlie and Phillip, were late in returning from the Vesper sawmill, where they worked packing shingles and tying lath. A worried mother sent young Emma out with a lantern. If a wolf should come up, she was told, all she had to do was stand still and whirl the lantern around.

"The boys was awful tickled when I got there," Emma said. Now they could find the broken bolt in the wagon—and whirl away the wolves with the light.

After the Vesper place, the family moved to Arpin, a one-horse sawmill town where L.W. had opened a blacksmith shop. Emma was 10.

Emma said that in winter, she and her brothers crossed the mill pond to school. One day coming home, they saw a team of four horses hooked up to a big load of logs go down into the mill pond. It was exciting to watch the men trying to get the horses out.

Mrs. Moody helped earn money by

raising beans for the Arpin boarding house near the sawmill. "Ma'd get a bushel of beans and we'd all sit around the table and pick them over," she said.

As Emma walked home from Sunday school one day, an aromatic fragrance lured her from the path: trailing arbutus. She thought she would pick a few for Ma, but Emma had an apron full of flowers when she got home.

L.W. had planned to build a house at Arpin, but twice someone burned his lumber so he gave up and sold the place. He packed the furniture, livestock and remaining lumber into a boxcar and headed for Plainfield where his father and mother had moved. The Moodys had spent seven years in the cutover; Emma was 14.

At Plainfield, L.W. ran a blacksmith shop. He could shoe horses and make bobsleds or just about anything anyone wanted.

Plainfield was a dust-bowl potato country. Sandstorms so thick you could hardly breathe moved one farm onto the next. And the one over there blew onto yours. Sand drifts that reached the top barbs of the fence.

At Plainfield, Emma met her first husband, Homer Gilbert "Bert" Layton. When she had got acquainted with the neighboring Davidson girls, she learned the circumstances of her future spouse's first vow.

As the Davidson girls sat at the kitchen table, Laura said to Bert Layton, "There goes the new girl." It was Emma walking by.

"Well, let me see." said Bert. "Yes, that's my little Dutch girl."

"Ha ha," said Laura.

Said Bert, "You just watch me get her."

In 1910, the two married. Four children were born while they tenant-farmed around Plainfield: Oscar, Ruth, Lewis and Carl. In 1925, the family moved to Nekoosa, where Bert helped blow the stumps out of the Nepco Lake bed. At Nekoosa, Robert was born.

Bert died of a ruptured appendix in 1929. Emma's father and children helped her build the house she still lives in. Four years later, she married Orlando Lee Harroun.

The day I visited with Emma Harroun at her Nekoosa home, it was her birthday. She was 95.

A former birthday came to mind. Because there had been no tree at Christmas, "Ma" got one for Emma's January 28 birthday.

"Ma set the tree up in the big living room of that old 16-room hotel and spread ribbons from the top branch," said Emma. "Each one of us little boys and girls would take a ribbon and parade around the tree while Ma sang in her beautiful voice. She made music and we marched to the music. I had a birthday tree and I was 5 years old."

Eva Werner
Early Years

Although Eva Werner now lives in Pittsville, she recalls her childhood in Wisconsin Rapids. Born in 1900 in a small house on 10th St., Mrs. Werner attended local schools and Wood County Normal teacher's college here. She taught for ten years and married in 1928, moving to Pittsville.

With only slight editing, these passages have been taken from Mrs. Werner's written reminiscences.

Eash season had a significance. In spring, we took the short-cut to the Irving grade school on 12th St. through the abandoned "Wood Cemetery" on Washington St. with its narrow winding pathway lined with purple lilac bushes. A babbling brook behind the school provided sparkling clear water and slippery stepping stones. It was alive with green frogs and pollywogs. The banks were covered with "Johnny Jump-ups" and blue violets which we picked on the way to and from school.

May was basket time. We spent hours constructing May baskets from wallpaper, used crepe paper, lace and ribbon, glorifying them with wild flowers, wintergreen berries and soft green moss. Sometimes a bit of candy and popcorn was added. What fun we had hanging them on the doorknobs of our friend's houses in the early evening.

May also meant the end of the school year, final report cards and at last, summer vacation.

Special activities such as swimming lessons and little league were unheard of. We improvised.

The road in front of our house afforded an excellent baseball field. Our parents and those of the other kids sat on their front steps rooting and cheering. We rolled hoops fashioned from wagon wheels on the hard path in front of our house. We played marbles, hopscotch, pom-pom pull away, anti-anti-over the shed roof and jarred fireflies in the evening.

If we were fortunate enough to have a penny to spend, we hurried down the courthouse hill to "Aunty Hazzard's" (Rickman's candy and variety store) adjacent to the Armory on First St. A tiny bell tinkled as we entered and Aunty Hazzard came out from the back room. She was a very small lady with a pleasant smile. Our penny could buy many things but we usually decided on an ice cream cone with real pink ice cream.

June brought the rag man with his rickety wagon and sway-backed horse, announcing his arrival by calling, "Rags, old iron!" We heard his voice blocks away and hurried to the shed to gather gunny bags of rags which he weighed with a household scale and reluctantly paid us a small sum, giving us spending money for the 4th of July.

The ice man was also popular in the neighborhood, making his rounds about twice a week, his wagon loaded with huge cakes of ice taken from the Wisconsin River. For all the patrons who had placed large placards inscribed "ICE" in their front windows, the ice man stopped, went around to the back of the wagon, clamped a pair of large tongs around 25 or 50 pound blocks of ice and delivered them to the house. Often, chips of ice flew off in the process and we begged for them to cool our tongues.

There was always a big parade on the 4th of July. Stores were draped with bunting, flags floated everywhere and concession stands were erected along the streets. Any size firecracker could be bought and shot off. They were carelessly thrown among crowds of people, often causing injuries. For our own fun on the lawn in the evening, we purchased sparklers and firecrackers. If they failed to explode, we broke them in half, lit the powder and watched them sizzle and dance on the lawn.

The weekly concert given by the city band in the round bandstand on the courthouse lawn was a delightful event on warm summer evenings. Families came in groups, spread blankets on the lawn and enjoyed the performance. There was a calm feeling without interruptions from noisy cars.

During a short intermission, we hurried to the popcorn stand and stood in line to spend our precious nickel for a large bag of popcorn. After the concert, friends greeted friends and kids romped on the lawn.

The big Ringling Brothers or Barnum and Bailey Circus visited our city every summer.

The circus train arrived about 3 or 4 a.m. via the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul on the west side of the city. My father always managed to be there to watch them unload. All the wagons, equipment, animals and personnel passed directly through the West Side business district, crossed the Grand Avenue Bridge and went up the hill to the circus grounds at what is now Witter Field. The animals were fed, tents erected and the parade organized for the big event at noon.

The parade retraced the route down the hill, across through the west side business district and back to the grounds. Crowds lined the street. What a thrill when we heard the band approaching, followed by glamorous circus wagons with live animals. We gazed entranced at the beautiful costumes.

As the days grew cooler in the fall, we spent Saturday or Sunday afternoons at the roller skating rink in the armory.

In winter, we went with our homemade sleds to Ebsen's hill on Saratoga Street, bundled in fleece-lined long underwear, thick socks, caps and mittens, not to mention black sateen bloomers.

If we had permission, we invited friends home for a candy pull. We all stomped into the kitchen, ice and snow clinging to the fuzzy wool socks and mittens, threw our clothes in a heap and huddled around the kitchen stove until mother had the sugar and syrup concoction cooked to the right consistency.

After it was slightly cooled, we rubbed our hands with butter and were given a lump of the sticky goo. We worked and pulled until we had a rope about one-half inch thick which we placed on the porch to harden then cut it into pieces. Yummy!

A Mick from the Sod

Even in her 1887 letter to her brother, Bat O'Day, Johanna Hickey speaks with an ancient brogue: "Jim's mother and his youngest brother Paddy is here with me since the first of april and they are expecting an other one out here next week that is older than mike and if you ever seen a mick from the sod it is thim."

Johanna's father, also named Bartholomew or "Bat" O'Day, immigrated to the town of Grand Rapids in the 1850s. It is said he got up at midnight to haul the first load of stone for the new Catholic church.

Stone should have been close to O'Day's heart. He had come from a land of it as had his wife, Mary McNamara. Three miles south of Corofin (1½ miles off the main road to Ennis) in County Clare, Ireland, lies Dysart O'Dea, homeland of Bat O'Day and his brothers. At Dysart O'Dea may be found the remains of the 12th century church of St. Tola, who named the "Dysart" or "deserted place" before his death in 735.

At Dysart O'Dea may be found the Cross of Dysart, repaired by Bartholomew's ancestor, Michael O'Dea, in 1683, and re-erected by Francis Hutchinson Synge in 1871.

At Dysart O'Dea may be found the O'Dea castle, considered to be a fine example of a towered keep and a sturdy specimen of the Norman square tower.

Dysart O'Dea, with its numerous historical monuments, marks the scene of a decisive battle in Irish history. In 1318, the combined forces of the Irish chieftains O'Connor, O'Dea, O'Brien and McNamara defeated the Normans under Richard De Clare and prevented any further advance of Norman power and influence into County Clare.

A short history of Dysart O'Day states that the St. Tola monastic settlement "was fortunate in having the valiant clan O'Dea as its patrons. They were kinsmen and allies of the ruling family of Thomond, the O'Briens, and when they rose to great power in the 12th century, Dysart Tola received a new prestige and another name. At this time in history, the government of the Irish church was being reorganized, and the monastic settlement of Dysart Tola became the new parish of Dysart O'Dea . . . ranging from Moryhee in the east to Mt. Callan in the west and embracing the country of the O'Griffeys, Ballygriffey and Kilnamona to the south."

The castle was built between 1470 and 1490 by Diarmaid O'Dea, Lord of Cineal Fearmic, when fashion and circumstances dictated that chieftains and retainers live in fortified houses easily defended by a few soldiers.

In 1570, the Earl of Ormaond took Dysart Castle by force from the O'Deas because the latter openly supported the Earl of Thomond against the English high sheriff in County Clare.

Soon after, the castle was restored to the O'Deas. In 1584, an inventory commissioned by Queen Elizabeth showed the castle belonging to Domhnal Mael (Bald) O'Dea.

Because Domhnal Mael supported the northern chiefs in the Nine Years War (1594-1603), the castle was granted to Danile Neylon, Protestant bishop of Kildare, but later was restored to the O'Deas, who again took up the cause of Catholic independence.

After the surrender of Limerick in 1651, the Cromwellians moved into County Clare. One of the castles garrisoned by the parliamentarians was Dysart. Much damage was done, including demolition of the battlements and the smashing of the staircase in two places.

After Cromwell's defeat of the Irish confederates, the castle reverted to the Neylons, who failed to pay their taxes, and it was taken by the high sheriff.

In the reign of Charles II, the castle was returned to Conor O'Dea, who repaired and inscribed the high cross that had been maliciously damaged by Cromwell's troops. The tower passed to his son, Michael O'Dea.

Over the years, the castle was abandoned. Much of the stone from the top floor and from the banquet hall of the castle somehow fell from the castle and rose again in the walls of nearby houses.

In 1968, John B. O'Day Jr., and his wife, Anola, were driving down the west coast of Ireland, exploring the land of his forefathers.

O'Day picked up some tourist brochures and disovered the existence of the O'Dea family castle at Dysart O'Dea. Two years later, he bid against a Breck shampoo heir and bought the castle from Brendan Keane, a farmer, butcher and O'Day relative.

Because of the historic battle fought at the site, permission to restore was difficult to obtain.

The stones from the castle had to be retrieved from buildings surrounding it. One neighbor dismantled an outbuilding and said he was returning the stones to the castle without charge.

"I said the lease was about to run out anyway," said O'Day.

Workers also provide problems. With the St. Tola church so close, "when there's a funeral, everybody goes. If there's a wedding, they're gone for two or three days."

Any obstacles no doubt will be overcome by a man with his own castle, a man who visits often and hears the earlier voice of his clan.

He is himself recognized.

"This is your heritage," the parish priest told O'Day upon first greeting. Said the priest, "All the O'Dea's had big hands."

Mary O'Day Miller
Her Story

When Doc Looze looked out his window at 5th and Oak and saw our team and sleigh racing up Oak Street, he said, "I'm staying right by the phone because I know I'm going to get a call soon."

After school, I had been playing with Mary Wagner at her house by the east side market square until my dad got through bringing in a load of hay and buying groceries. This time, he had a little light bob sleigh and his lively driving team, Dan and Lady. Dan was flighty; he couldn't stand to have anything touch his heels.

My dad picked me up at Mary's and got the boys at Rowland's store and we started out for our farm on 32nd St. Everything was coated with ice.

When we went to 3rd St. and turned on Oak, the sleigh started sliding. It hit Dan's heels and away we went up past Doc Looze's to 16th. My dad steered for to let go the reins.

When I landed on my face, a chunk of ice went in my eye. When I got up, my dad said, "Are you all right?"

"I guess my eye is out," I said.

"What are you limping from?"

"I think I did something to my ankle."

He took me to Mrs. Weinbauer's. She started heating irons and towels, just the wrong thing to do.

Mary Miller

We called Dr. Looze. He picked us up and took us home. "You're going to have to have a little chloroform here," he said and put some stitches in my eyelid. My eye was still in there. In the meantime, the team was doing a roundabout downtown, losing all the groceries, sacks of flour and I don't know what all.

Around February, I got back to Howe school. I couldn't go out and play like the other kids so Emily Mead and I would sit on a kind of railing there. I could swing my foot and that made it easier.

Dear Old Mrs. McCormick

My older brother was going to school and I pestered the daylights out of my mother to let me go too. She talked to dear old Mrs. McCormick at Lincoln who said, "Why don't you let her go? She'll get tired of it." They let me go but I didn't get tired of it.

The next year they changed first grade to the Howe school so I had to go to first grade again with Mrs. McCormick.

The other kids could go home for lunch but I had to take mine. One day I finished my lunch and thought, "Oh, I'll just hide" so I crawled under Mrs. McCormick's desk. When the kids started coming in, she said, "Did anyone see Mary? Do you know if she used the telephone?

She got through with roll call and sat at her desk. I pinched her leg and she went straight up. "Mary," she said, "How could you do a thing like that?"

The Dove Coop

My parents bought 202 acres at 32nd and Chestnut that had been owned by the Jake Lutz family. The house was on two acres west of 32nd. All the barns were on 200 acres east of 32nd. The Lutzes raised the hops for their brewery out there. They left behind a basement full of wine barrels and some rhubarb wine.

We always had the Eberhardts do all our bacon and hams and sausages in our beautiful smoke house and bake oven. They'd spend three days or more making sausage. One year Dad said, "I made a big mistake. I wanted to treat them to some of the rhubarb wine." The sausage wasn't so good that year.

There was a horse barn, a cow barn and a big hay barn. The Lutzes liked to have doves around. On the lean of the hay barn the lutzes had a huge dove coop. My dad wouldn't have doves around. He didn't want them putting droppings on the hay. "Papa, if I clean the dove coop up, can I have it for my dollhouse?" I said.

To get to my dollhouse, I had to climb up the fence,

work my way up along the knots in the shingle roof.

There was a big ice house on the property and a big wooden ice box in one room with a drain through the floor. The Lutzes kept their beer and wine in there.

On Saturdays, we would wash, get the meals, bake, and churn butter. We had a big barrel churn and the stomper kind too for smaller batches. Sometimes the butter would come fast. Then again, when the temperature wasn't right it wouldn't come so fast.

We had a 16 by 16 foot hardwood maple kitchen floor with no finish that I had to scrub—and there dasn't be any patches. When my dad came home one evening, I was still scrubbing the floor. "Can't it wait till morning?" he said.

I said, "Tomorrow is Sunday morning" and went on working.

The next time I got ready to scrub, I couldn't find my things. My mother had already gone to bed. "I can't find my scrub brush and pail," I told her. She didn't like to see anything dirty.

"You know where it belongs," she said.

"It isn't there."

"Well, I guess you can't do anything," she said and I went to bed.

The next morning on my way to the outdoor toilet I saw the brush, scrub pail and rag where my dad had thrown them off the end of the porch. I was scrubbing that night to make up for it.

Bat O'Day

My dad's name was Bartholomew O'Day, but everybody called him Bat. He had horses and horses and more horses. He'd get a couple boxcars and take heavy workhorses up into the logging woods during the winter.

My dad and mother, Dorathea Sasse, were married in Eagle River in 1888. She was in charge of the supply shed for loggers, the only woman in the whole bunch.

Dad smoked the peace pipe with the Indians at the green corn dances. A wealthy squaw with a lot of Indian ponies had figured how to tan hides so they were white. She would come to the green corn dance very big around. After a while she'd peel off a hide, all beaded, and give it to one of the other squaws. She would give away five or six that she had layer after layer.

We kids were half Catholic and half Protestant. My mother was German Evangelical Lutheran. My dad was Catholic. The first child, Arthur, went to my mother. The next, John, went to my dad. I went with my mother and Edwin to Catholic.

My dad had asthma. Working with horses and hayseed all the time, he'd come in from the barn and could hardly breathe. He'd pour Himrod's asthma powder on a saucer, put a funnel over it and inhale that. Then he'd go out and get all wheezed up again.

Salt of the Earth

Part of my dad's farm was where the Girl Scout camp is now at the end of Chestnut Street.

The Indians had a settlement on that creek at one time. My dad used to plow up all kinds of artifacts and arrowheads.

There was a wild cranberry marsh nearby. Dad had the W.P.A. put a drainage ditch from Washington Ave. to the One Mile Creek so he could use that

Mary Miller

land.

North of the camp my dad had a burying ground—for horses. He would go in with a team and scraper and dig out a hole. There are a lot of horse bones out there.

Where the camp is was a dense woods. One time I was picking blueberries like mad in there. Ooh, they were so good. I was getting pretty warm though so I thought I'd go sit on a stump. I stretched out my hand down to the roots. Pretty soon a root commenced to move. I had my hand on a snake. It didn't hurt me.

It was woodsy all around. Snakes would come onto the cement sidewalk at night because it was warm. One time there was a great big one stretched out at the entrance to the house. I grabbed him and whacked him one. Snakes? I have never had any fear of them.

At Campfire Girl camp, I couldn't get honors for swimming so I had to get them some other way like blazing a trail around the lake.

where I had to go I grabbed the stick and whacked the snake. The stick broke in three pieces but I managed to kill the snake. I brought him back to camp and said, "How many points do I get for skinning and mounting this?"

I might have been a swimmer if it hadn't been for the experience I had at the 1st Street swimming pool. Trying to learn to swim, I'd paddle around on a long board. Two or three boys snuck up and whipped that plank over and I got underneath it. From then on I didn't have any faith in water.

Even though I couldn't swim, I earned the most honor points of anybody in the city because I had the opportunity to cash in on some of the things at home. I could birdwatch, or do anything in the woods. I could get honors by killing a chicken, plucking it, cooking it and serving it.

We had the only troop in Rapids. Carol Bradford was the leader. Some other girls were Ruth Kellner, Carol Borman, Phylis Waters, Helen Gee, Katherine Gee, Esther Lavigne, Jean Nash and Hazel Wood.

One time, I was very embarrassed. A friend of mine who lived across the street from Jean Nash was always daring to do things. Her folks were gone and she said, "Let's go down in the basement and find some canned mincemeat. We'll take a can and I'll walk part way home with you and we'll sit down and eat some mincemeat."

She went down and snuck a can out of the house. I thought that was funny. Why should she have to steal something out of her own house?

We got out and she said, "The Nashes are gone. Let's go over and see if their door is locked.

We went to the Nash's back door. She said, "I know how to unlock that."

We went in the back entrance. "Is there anything here you want?" she said.

She took a swimming suit. A pair of slippers fell out. "Here you can have these," she said and made me take them.

Later, I went to the Nash house. Guy Nash answered the door. "Mr. Nash, here are some bathing shoes that belong to you," I said.

"How did you get them?"

I said my friend stopped in and she knew how to open the door and went in.

Soon after at the Elks club, Guy Nash was master of ceremonies. My Campfire Girl name was Waubansie. He said, "Waubansie, you are the salt of the earth."

I felt like going right through the floor; why was I the salt of the earth? He meant it as a compliment but I thought it was just terrible.

Bohemian Settlement

Saturday night dancing used to go till dawn at the Bohemian settlement down by New Rome in Adams County. Farmers would chip in for a keg of Grands Rapids beer and Frank Capek would play polkas on his Victrola.

Frank's son, Joe Capek (b. 1897) remembers a dance at his parents' house.

"We had a big room, and I was sitting on the stairs. The old folks were dancing and drinking beer. I took a drink. How could they drink it? It was so bitter."

Later, there were times when you went to a dance and, if the girls smelled beer, they wouldn't dance with you. That's how it was then.

The girls probably looked twice anyway when Joe arrived. Instead of a horse, he drove a Holstein bull he had broken. Even so, one girl who went with him said she never had a better time.

Later, his old man got a Guernsey bull and Joe broke it, too. So, he cut hay on the marshes over by Dyracuse Mound with a team of two bulls.

When he came down from the north, Joe ran across his wife-to-be, Dola York, at dances and parties. Joe was playing schottisches, waltzes and square dances on the concertina he had learned by practicing on a mouth organ.

Joe's coal-dealer father had immigrated to the United States at age 17 and had come up to New Rome from Chicago when Joe was a couple of years old. Along with Bohemians, such as Resebek, Jaborek, Bubla and Janacek, he homesteaded a farm along what is now the east bank of Lake Petenwell. Capek said his father's place was about 15 miles south of Nekoosa and five miles west of the Wisconsin River.

"Up here, if you had 160 acres, in the old country that would be a millionaire." He said farmland had been precious in Bohemia. When soil was depleted, farmers would plow deeper and bring fresh soil up.

Even the sand country of Strongs Prairie and New Rome had to be cleared of trees and cultivated. "We'd put five horses on the breaking plow. Little stuff, we'd cut off. Big trees we'd pull out. The new land was good. We raised corn, rye, some awful nice potatoes.

"The time I plowed with a walking plow, I could have walked to Missouri many times," said Capek.

Cows had to be taken out in the morning to better pasture two miles away, then brought back at noon for water and out again.

The Capeks also kept sheep. "The lamb didn't come home so I took the shotgun," said Joe. "Just as I went over the hill, I see a timber wolf had him. Then he took off and just loped away."

Capek said there also were coyotes, rabbits, prairie chickens, quail and foxes.

Much of the area once settled by Capek's Bohemian neighbors was Wisconsin River bottom land. "Farmers on the top didn't have too good pasture. They'd pay to pasture with people in the bottom land."

When the bottom lands were covered by Lake Petenwell, many farmers moved to nearby high ground.

Development has brought many changes. The crossroads store and post office of "New Rome" is under water. Much of "New Rome Creek" has been flooded for lakes Camelot and Sherwood. Even Barnum Rock, at what now is Barnum Bay, was removed, this time by the farmers themselves. "They used to drill in that rock and dynamite and make sandrock for building.

"Barnum School used to be way below where it's flooded," said Capek. "They built a new schoolhouse past the Hideaway and up the hill."

As a young man, Joe often visited Nekoosa, crossing over the lower ferry at Point Basse or the upper ferry near the present bridge. "I would stand by the horses' heads in case they got scared. When it froze up, we crossed the ice."

Capek's father used to go in the Bentz Hotel,

but little Joe "was bashful to go in there. In those days, you never seen a woman in a tavern."

Having learned horseshoeing from his dad, Capek worked in Prentice Coon's Market Street blacksmith shop. "I shoed horses or, if anybody wanted to go anywhere, we took them."

When he wasn't busy, Capek worked in an adjacent garage. He bought himself a Model T when he was 19 years old. In 1917, Joe joined the "9th Company Replacement Training Troops" at Camp Grant in Rockford, Ill., but was mustered out without seeing foreign shores.

For a while, Capek lived at Cornell in Chippewa County. One time, he built a tractor his farmer neighbor said wouldn't work. "I said because it's homemade, I know it can pull a four-horse grader. After I showed him, the same guy wanted me to make him one."

Joe Capek

On his Stella township farm, Capek grubbed and dynamited a lot of stumps. He even hauled water to his land so he wouldn't go into debt for a well. But Capek came back to the sandy soils of New Rome and Nekoosa. "If I have to plow 10 acres here and raise the same amount as five acres there, I'd rather do that because it's easier working."

Capek had been considering buying the Sampson farm, west of Wisconsin Rapids, but he got Arkansas fever instead. He bought a truck with a rack on it and headed south. "It wasn't anything like them real estate guys said. It was hot and hilly. That land wasn't fit for a man to live."

Capek's other stories continue to suggest a colorful life.

—Early on a morning during Prohibition, Capek said, a Monroe Center moonshine salesman got his big car stuck near Devil's Elbow and walked to Capek's farm. Joe hooked up his team and pulled the car out. "He had that moonshine. Well, I thought I'd take a shot. No breakfast and I had a kind of a cold. That day, I thought I'd burn up. I was pretty green."

—Capek said he went to Mauston, bought a pickup truck and started hauling milk from farms to a cheese factory in Strongs Prairie. The "outlaws" he had displaced threatened him. "They said they was going to clean up on me." One morning, Capek had hold of a milk can at the cheese factory when a rival came up behind him. Capek turned around and the man hit him. With two enemies and "the old man" waiting, Capek decided it would be more prudent to take the case to court than fight it out on the spot.

—Capek fared better with Strangler Lewis. "At the big livery barn where I worked, Strangler Lewis came in the garage and wanted to wrestle. I grabbed him and took my foot and clipped him behind there quick as lightning and down he goes."

After the fall, said Capek, "he wanted to go into partnership."

The Gee Boys

When the Gee boys—Grant, Harvey and Fred—got ornery, Mrs. Gee had only to point to Pa's razor strap. "We got a little walloping once in a while," said Grant (born 1899). "I guess we had it coming."

When Grant was very young, "us kids were out in the road playing baseball." Grant batted the ball through a neighbor's window. As a lesson, his dad had him replace the window, using Grant's own allowance and labor.

When Harvey and Fritz growled about having to cut four-foot lengths of firewood into 16-inch logs, they talked Grant into asking his dad why they couldn't have it delivered in short, easy pieces like their neighbor, Larry Nash, did.

"Dad," said Grant, after he got up enough nerve. "Mr. Nash gets his all sawed up nice."

"Oh yes?" said Pa.

"Why don't you?" said Grant. "It would make things easier."

"If I did that," said Pa, "what the devil would you boys be doing after school?"

When it came time for the boys and their sisters Helen and Catherine to go to Sunday school, Pa told them they had to go but they could pick any one they wanted. Grant chose the Congregational church in what is now the Rapids Mall area.

Grant's father, Harvey Gee, was a saloon keeper in the building later housing the Mecca tavern and in the restaurant next to it, now the Lunch Box. It is said that as a saloon keeper, Gee never touched a drop of liquor. "He wouldn't let us kids come in there until we were 21 years old," said Grant.

Gee also didn't keep alcohol in the house. He said it was made to sell not to drink.

After Grant's mother, the former Anna Beske, died, Harvey bought, through delinquent taxes, 1,000 acres in Adams County where he built a dam that created a flowage. The property was known as "Deer Lodge." Following Gee's death, Grant's brother, Harvey, "quite a promoter," sold most of the 1,000 acres to the developers of the future Lake Sherwood.

During his high school summer vacations, Grant found a mentor much like his father. With friends Russell Alpine and Harvey Borman, Grant worked for M.O. Potter on Potter's cranberry marsh, cleaning beds of weeds. Potter, who lived in Rapids, would bring the boys in on Saturday. On Sunday, he would pick them up and take them back to the marsh, where they stayed in the barracks provided for pickers. "I managed to save enough to buy a bicycle for $35," said Grant.

A homemade boat provided much recreation for the west-side boys. "We hammered together a boat and tarred it half an inch thick," said Grant. "We found a pair of oars and launched it where the Kraft Mill is now. We loved to go up and down the river."

Grant was a 17-year-old junior at Lincoln High School when he enlisted with five friends in the Army. At the end of World War I, the five young soldiers, Gee, Alpine, Elmer Waldvogel, Benjamin Deyo and Royal Grignon, returned to Lincoln. "We all got up and showed off with our uniforms on," Grant said.

In return for their services, the superintendent pronounced, "You boys have had enough worldly experience, we're going to give you your diploma."

The sad part, said Grant, came when he went home and told his dad he didn't have to go back to school. "They gave us our diplomas," he explained.

"Do you think you earned that?" demanded Pa. "You go back and finish your last year."

The first job Grant took after the war was at the Stange and Ellis box factory west of the present Rapids Mall. His job was taking horizontally sawn boards off a bandsaw.

After a while, Pa said, "How you doin'?"

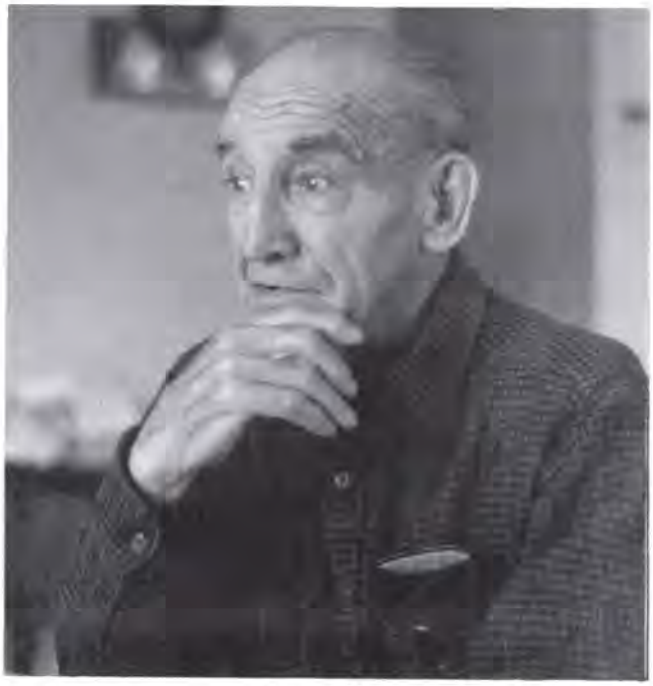
"First rate, I guess. They haven't fired me yet anyway."

"How many hours you work?"

"Ten hours a day."

"How much do you get an hour?"

"Ten cents."



Grant Gee

"Well," said Pa, "you wouldn't have to be too good at arithmetic to figure out how much you get in a day!"

When Prentiss-Wabers, now Preway, started up in the old Wipperman furniture building near the east end of the Green Bay railroad bridge, Grant had a chance for a better job as a drill-press operator.

Prentiss-Wabers soon moved to a building farther east in with a company that made dredges. Grant worked there a number of years, often doing repair work on Sundays. One day in 1923, the foreman told him, "This company's going broke. You go down to Nekoosa and see Mike Powers at his big machine shop. You finish up your machinist training."

As Grant waited for the streetcar at the First National Bank corner, Phil Eron, a World War I buddy came by driving an old Model T truck. "What are you doing?" Eron yelled.

Grant told him he was headed for Nekoosa to look for a job. "I'm pretty busy, " said Eron. "How'd you like to help me out?"

Grant jumped in the truck. He figured he'd work a couple of months for Phil and his brother, Lou Eron, who owned the plumbing firm. Before Grant left, Lou asked "How would you like to learn the plumbing trade?"

"I don't think so," said Grant. "I started as a machinist and that's what I want to learn."

At supper, of course, Pa had a few questions. "How are you doing?"

"I finished up helping Phil Eron and now Lou wants me to learn the plumbing trade but I told him I wanted to be a machinist."

"Oh my God," said Pa. "Machinists are a dime a dozen. You better go into the plumbing trade."

"He talked me into plumbing," said Grant, who immediately went to work. A quarter-century later, Grant Gee joined Phil Eron in the plumbing firm of Eron and Gee. "We kept the wolf away from the door," he said. Pa hadn't steered him wrong.

All the World Wars

Grant Gee and his fellow soldiers are waiting in shell-shocked Normandy to move inland and build a landing strip for their P-38s when the village is visited by a sight for sore eyes; women in silk appearing like guardian angels. It's practically the day after D-Day, and already the parachutes of the invading liberators have been transformed into beautiful dresses.

WW II

This is World War II, Grant Gee's second world war. His first began in May 1917, when he and four other Lincoln High School juniors enlisted in the 1st Wisconsin Cavalry and were sent to Camp MacArthur, Texas, with the 32nd Division.

It didn't take long for those running the war to realize cavalry weren't going to work very well in a modern war and Gee's group was combined into the 120th Field Artillery, although none of them had seen a cannon other than a Civil War memento in a park. There were no cannons at Camp MacArthur anyway.

There were no cannons at Camp Merritt, N.J., either, so Gee and the others rode horses around and drilled until they were sent from another exotic place down the road—Hoboken, N.J.—to a foreign battle. Gee was loaded with 11,000 men onto a confiscated German tour ship rechristened "Leviathan." The big transport soon outdistanced its escorts and sailed in nine days to Great Britain.

"Before we unloaded by boat," said Gee, "they told us to come and look at the green of Scotland because

we wouldn't be seeing it in a little while." Half-a-dozen destroyers surrounded the Leviathan and blew black smoke around until it disappeared.

During the smooth trans-Atlantic crossing, none of the soldiers got sick, said Gee, so they were ready for the hearty meal the English had prepared upon the arrival in Liverpool. When the cook came out, he asked them how they liked it.

"One of the best we've had in a long time," someone said.

"Do you know what kind of meat it was?"

"Why, beef!"

"That was horse meat," the English cuisinier said.

It was not indignation that caused regurgitation but the choppy waters of the English Channel from Southampton to LeHavre where the famous "40 and 8" boxcars waited to transport the young Americans.

At a modern version of one of Napolean's camps, Gee trained 60 days with French instructors. "We got artillery pieces from the French, beautiful horses from the Belgians to pull them around and special communications equipment from the English. It showed how ill-equipped we were. All we had when we went over was a Springfield rifle."

Because he was relatively small and lightweight, Gee was trained as a telephone operator at the gun position where he received information from observors and relayed it to an executive officer who made corrections on gun sighting.

Gee also had to learn more primitive sign language. The first kite-like combat aircraft could send messages to the ground but the ground could not return them. Gee had to learn semaphores and placement of panels resembling small white bedsheets to signal the planes.

After the training ended, Gee's battalion was chosen to take over the training of incoming Americans, a task he remained at until the end of the war. After the Armistice of Nov. 11, 1918, Gee almost missed the party when he was ordered to stand guard.

So many of the local French came by shouting, "Fin le guerre" that Gee's superior officer said, "Hell, you go on and join them."

"We went to a village," said Gee. "The French had one of those old pianos pulled out onto the cobblestones. They were dancing and having a great time. The French soldiers were very liberal with the wine and champagne."

Gee wondered how the French had managed to keep so much booze from the Germans. When he saw a guy taking the top off a manure pile with a pitch fork he had an idea. Sure enough, out came a bottle.

On April 9, 1919, Gee rejoined the 32nd. After his clothes were boiled and the cooties scared away, he was shipped back via another German ship. At Boston, Gee was allowed to keep his helmet, uniform and gas mask. "They gave us $60 and a ticket home, kicked us in the pants and told us to get going."

Despite the apparent rudeness, Gee remained in the National Guard. Nearly a quarter of a century later, he was summoned to the 120 Field Artillery again. It was 1940 and World War II had begun in Europe.

After Pearl Harbor, the 32nd Division was called to the Pacific, but all officers from colonel on down were denied duty there. "They called us retreads," said Gee of the WWI vets. "I was assigned to an air corps group in California."

While working at a coastal radar station near Eureka, Gee, in charge of food and housing for the enlisted men, was able to improve on the horse-steak experience he had earlier in Liverpool.

"What kind of meat is this?" asked the visiting colonel whom Gee had, without thinking, asked to supper. It obviously was venison, one of the little red deer from the surrounding hills.

"I didn't tell him we had been eating it all summer," said Gee.

Finally, Gee was allowed to go to Europe. In March 1944, he landed in Southampton again, with a support group for P-38 fighters escorting bombers over targets in Germany.

After D-Day, Gee landed on what was left of Omaha Beach. His squadron moved several times within France before ending at a base near Frankfurt, Germany. "We kept close to the front on Patton's tail," he said.

Now a major, it was Gee's job to work with the enlisted men. "Some of them didn't know how to set up a tent," he said. "I acted like a father to them."

Although he never fired a shot in combat, many of the pilots Gee worked with were killed. To him fell the task of gathering the belongings of the dead and writing condolences back to that home nearly every soldier, no matter how enchanted by the exotic, yearns to see again.

Baptism of Fire

As told by Fred McCarthy

You never really know what war is going to be like. You get hyped up to the point where you want to go; at least some guys do. But you realize there's a war ahead, that some guys aren't going to come back. We knew that. We felt it.

I was with the 11th Armored Division of the 41st Tank Batallion in Patton's Third Army—a buck sergeant tank commander and platoon leader. We went day and night straight up into the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans were coming through the Ardennes. It was Hitler's last opportunity. He wanted to break through and separate the two armies. It was our baptism of fire.

We went in winter. Being in a tank in 20-below weather could be difficult, physically. The tank sucked cold air through the unheated tank to the motor. A lot of tankers got frostbitten feet. After a while, we took our boots off and cut up blankets for socks.

Besides discomfort, there were a lot of ways to get killed. You get on a narrow road with mountains on both sides. A bazooka might hit the first tank and then pick off the rest down the row. They had armor-piercing shells that went through the plate and ricocheted around inside, cutting up people.

When you're in a tank, your head is out. I never really wanted to put the hatch down. I wanted to be able to get out if something happened. That's how I got wounded.

The funny part about getting hit is that it's the one you didn't hear. I got a bullet through my hand and shrapnel wounds over my face and neck.

Every night, when we gassed up, they had what they call "bed check Charlie." We had to gas up with cans you could hear rattle for miles at night. So, they would shell us. If they'd hit those cans, they'd explode. That was our biggest worry.

There were times I came close to getting it. I came around a turn in one of those old German cities, and there was a big tiger tank looking straight at me. I looked at the huge muzzle-blast on the end of the barrel and figured, "This is it. You're done." Believe me, I sweated bullets. Luckily, the guys were on top of the tank. I had the .50-caliber out and I just swept them across, and away they went.

The fear of death and the fear of God come together. A lot of the guys turned religious during the war.

With some, it's just the opposite. They want to know, "God, why me?" Some guys hated God. "Why did He put them in that position?"

Once in the Battle of the Bulge, an "88" shell came over so close, it pulled my helmet right off. Believe me, I shrunk right into that tank. All of a sudden, your helmet disappears off your head. It scares the living hell out of you. You think, "Boy, this is closer than I expected."

I was a fatalist. When your number's on a bullet or shell, you're gonna go. I made sure I lived every day to the fullest. In a lot of ways, I enjoyed it. The adventure was in me.

The hardest part was when your buddies go. One fella was shooting the breeze with me from the back of another tank. All of a sudden, an air burst got him and just blew him right out. You want to help him, but it's too late. The top of his head is gone. You start to think about his family and all that. You think who are you going to talk to now. When you lose people like that, it hurts.

Fred McCarthy, 1944

DESTROYED TOWN: This proved to be an often-repeated scene as American tanks entered the narrow streets of German towns.

SLAVE LABORERS: "We were moving so fast," said McCarthy, "(that) the Germans made them dig holes for themselves, shot them and dumped them in the holes. They were Polish and Russians who had been used as slave laborers."

SS PRISONERS OF WAR: Captured SS guards from the Mauthausen concentration camp attemped to conceal their identity by wearing Wermacht (regular army) coats. These guards, said McCarthy, were executed shortly after the photo was taken.

'We were looking at hundreds of bodies'

We heard about Buchenwald, but nothing could have prepared us for what we saw at Mauthausen. When we got inside the walls, we were looking at hundreds of bodies piled here and there. Then you get in those stinking barracks, four bunks high, stink and filth and straw full of ticks and mice. The people in bunks were so emaciated, you could see bone and open sores. They didn't have the strength to get out of bed.

We saw burned bodies; heads and arms and legs. And the crematorium, a big oven they slid the bodies into. You couldn't imagine how people could harm their fellow man so badly. How could a people so civilized and so knowledgeable as the Germans carry on systematic elimination of this magnitude? There were 15,000 or so in that camp, and you're talking about 2, 3, 4, 5 million in Europe.

You get to the point where you're so dang mad and so dang bitter, you just want to take it out on somebody.

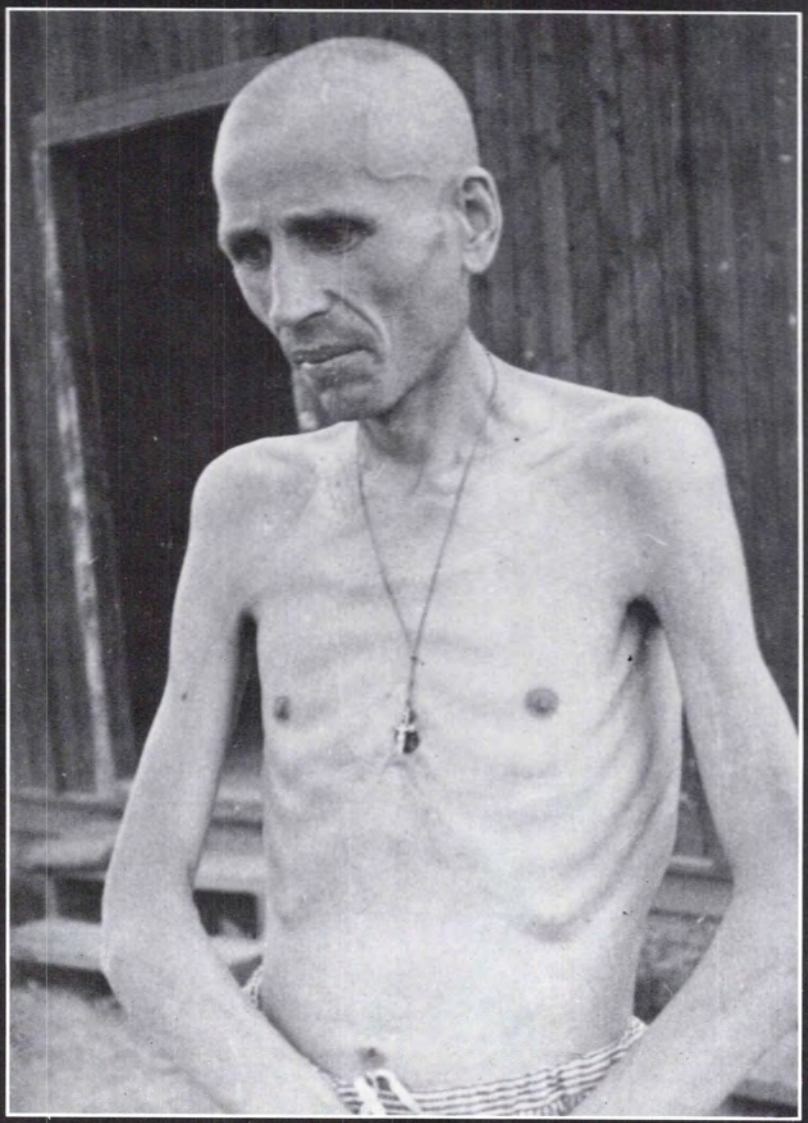
When they were liberated, the ones that were fairly healthy took off and went through the countryside. They picked up guns dropped by the Germans and started going around and killing the Austrians. They would go into their homes and shoot them or kick them out. At the same time, we had Germans coming out of the territory the Russians had captured. We had a hell of a time with them because they knew if they went to Russia, they would never come home. And we had the Russians trying to take advantage of the situation. They would capture a factory and take everything out. All they would leave would be a cement slab.

The survivor in the picture was happy he was liberated. I don't know if he lived. We gave them food, but their stomachs couldn't handle it, so we boiled everything down to a broth.

He only spoke a little bit. He didn't talk family. He didn't have any family left. These were all Jews.

MEETING THE RUSSIANS: "The Russians wanted to get to the Danube," McCarthy said. "They wanted all of Austria." McCarthy is second from right in this group of three Russians and two Americans.

HEADING HOME: French slave laborers, on their way back to France after being liberated by the Americans, appear to be saying "Thanks!"



The Survivor

It was an ideal theater in which to play war. In front of the abandoned Tri-City hangar, the apron was spread with shattered glass. A beacon tower creaked in the wind that came off the overgrown landing strip. To the east, plumbing pipes protruded from several concrete foundation slabs. Nails and hardware, in great profusion, ground underfoot. Not far south, a small, concrete, box-like building still stood as if the lone survivor of a bombing raid.

What is now Alexander Field contained, in 1955, my playground by day. Judging by the graffiti and garbage, it was someone else's by night.

As I was to learn, it had earlier hosted a facility less frivolous but more fantastic—a World War II prisoner of war camp.

Tri-City wasn't the only such site. Every state but four had prisoner-of-war camps—a total of 156 permanent base camps and 377 temporary branch camps.

In addition to a major Japanese and German POW installation at Camp McCoy (now Fort McCoy in Monroe County), there were 36 branch camps in Wisconsin, mostly at such semi-rural locations as Barron, Columbus, Ripon and Sturgeon Bay. Their purpose was to provide workers for canning, lumbering and farm work during the wartime manpower shortage.

Between March, 1943, and June, 1946, according to the February, 1977, issue of "American History Illustrated," Axis POWs performed 106,216,982 man-days of work. Of the estimated labor value of $359,796,456, about 20 percent was paid to the prisoners for harvesting such crops as cotton in Mississippi, potatoes in Missouri, peanuts in Georgia, sugar beets in the West and fruit in Maryland. Most of the POWs volunteered for the work, both as a diversion and because of the pay. Contractors paid the U.S. treasury, and the United States paid the workers, usually 80 cents per day in script good only at their canteen.

According to a 1979 research paper by Charlotte Wright of Logan, Utah, then at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, a branch prisoner of war camp was established in 1945 at what had been Tri-City Airport. The base camp was Fort Sheridan, Ill. Commander of the Rapids camp was Capt. Thomas. R. Ryan.

Sanitary conveniences, water supply and electricity had to be improved to meet Geneva Convention standards, but most of the buildings already were on the property. The 100 to 200 prisoners were housed in the old hangar, where they slept on cots. An abandoned wooden barracks, built in the 1920s for an Air Force radar training post, housed the approximately 30 guards. Another barracks served as mess hall, and a solitary-confinement hut was built.

There was a concrete well house and a shower room. A high fence surrounded the property, and there were wooden guard towers.

In order to fill its own needs, the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association acted as contracting agent for the POWs. "This is the most critical time in the history of the cranberry industry in Wisconsin," said Vernon C. Goldsworthy, association secretary, in a 1945 Daily Tribune. "We hope these prisoners of war will work out satisfactorily because, if they do, it will be a Godsend to the growers. This year, as every year since the war started, both the Army and the Navy is making heavy demands upon the cranberry growers for fruit to be shipped and processed for consumption of the armed forces all over the world," he said.

Goldsworthy and William F. Thiele, association president, also assigned prisoners to such other employers as Sampson Canning, Pittsville Canning and Griffith Nursery. Farmers including Russell Bell and Louis Arnold, eventually were allowed to hire POWs. Also employing prisoners, according to Ms. Wright, were Gross Brothers, Arthur and Harold Clark, and L.L. Bender.

The Tri-City POWs were captured from German armored or infantry corps in Africa, Normandy, Belgium and Germany. They were between the ages of 17 and 42. Some spoke enough English to be understood.

According to the Daily Tribune's Don Unferth, in a feature story published May 5, 1945, the prisoners arose on a typical day at 5:30 a.m., were picked up by their employers at 7:30 a.m. and began work at 8 a.m. Their food was brought to them at noon. Work ended at 5 p.m., when the employers returned them to camp. They ate supper at 5:30 p.m. and were free until bedtime at 9 p.m.

Fred McCarthy

German POWs, some destined for America.

Unferth, a young reporter who later became a vice president of the Chicago White Sox professional baseball organization, said there were approximately 150 prisoners. He assured readers that the POWs were not being coddled, that they worked hard and were well guarded. On cranberry marshes, prisoners weeded bogs, ditched large areas and dug up sod.

Unferth walked through the American barracks in mid morning, when all of the guards were out working except for one who suffered from malaria. The reporter said he saw Army blouses with a half-dozen overseas stripes, and that some guards had been previously wounded.

Clothing for the prisoners was largely Army surplus. It was the duty of each prisoner to keep a large PW stenciled on the clothing he wore. Prisoners had mail privileges, although they were suspended due to the chaotic conditions in Germany.

Prisoners and guards ate in the same mess hall but at different times. Food was prepared by prisoners who had been trained at Fort Sheridan. According to Unferth, typical fare was rhubarb and french toast for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, and baked beans and vegetables for supper.

Newell Jasperson heard prisoners complain of "one day beans and the next day macaroni." He said he tried to help them out by allowing them to eat the sugar left in sacks from the canning factory and by giving them candy bars.

Elwell Shannon, an Edgerton native, returned from New Guinea and was assigned to the Fort Sheridan prisoner-of-war camp prior to volunteering for duty at the new Tri-City

WORK CREW: Larry Truchinski (rear) poses with prisoner-of-war friends. (Photo from Larry Truchinski)

camp, where he was sent in March 1945.

Sgt. Shannon served as security guard, making the rounds of cranberry marshes with his POW translator.

The work crews had two or three guards, and no prisoner attempted to escape, said Shannon. One of his main duties was to restrain the owners from pampering prisoners with pies, cakes and other treats. "All the prisoners had was kidney stew, every day," he said. "They rolled it in large doughballs to cook it. They would take it in aluminum containers to where the prisoners were working."

The only discipline problems, Shannon said, were two former SS men who refused to work and attempted to undermine authority. "We put one troublemaker in a hot shed next to the hangar," he said, but the punishment failed, and the two Nazis had to be sent back to Fort Sheridan.

There was little evidence of a "super race."

"Most were reluctant draftees. They were fighting because they were ordered to," said Shannon. "They were so happy to be here that they wanted to stay."

In the autumn of 1946, the prisoners left Wisconsin Rapids. One wrote back on April 1, 1948: "I always remember your town very well, and I and my comrades, we liked it very much over there. Most of the time, we listened to WFHR, Wisconsin Rapids, because you always had such wonderful music and fine transcriptions on the air.

"We liked your state very much and, when we traveled back by ship, I promised them to write to you and express our thanks for the wonderful time we had through many days.

"Best regards to all our former employers in Cranmoor and around there. Sincerely, Hans Flessner."

Willi Strahler, a former prisoner interviewed by Ms. Wright, spent four days at the Tri-City camp and 10 months at Marshfield. He returned permanently to the United States, working in Port Edwards for three years before moving to Niles, Ill., where he lived in 1979.

According to Unferth, the Germans did not lose their customary Teutonic traits. When a Daily Tribune photographer prepared to snap a picture of a prisoner who had rigged up a makeshift radio, other prisoners suddenly began shouting at him in German that his apron was dirty, and he should put on a fresh one—so he would appear neat and clean for the picture.

When German prisoners of war worked on the Potter cranberry marsh in the town of Cranmoor, Larry Truchinski worked with them. He remembers two names: Herbert, a young man who had been raised by the German government and often was truck-driver

A Rapids POW

Truchinski's helper, and Hugo, who was almost blind. Hugo, said Truchinski, was "no trouble," although it was difficult for him to carry out the light tasks he was assigned.

The POWs were very cooperative, Truchinski said. Only one claimed to be a Nazi. Truchinski said he had orders not to fraternize with the prisoners, although the order often was violated.

One lunch hour, a husky POW engaged Truchinski in a wrestling match, from which the American emerged victorious. "I guess you made short work of him," said Truchinski's boss, Hank Westfall.

At noon, the Army brought out hot stew and dry bread, which was sweetened by marmalade supplied by marsh owner Roy Potter. "When we shipped the cranberries, we had large, preused paper bags, which had contained sugar," said Truchinski. "The prisoners would salvage the residual granules in a bag, which they had completely opened and laid out on the floor. They would mash up cranberries and add sugar and eat them raw. My friend, Wally Schalla, and I cautioned them not to eat so much of it without other food," said Truchinski. "After they got sick, they couldn't stand the sight of cranberries."

Book of the Dead

Some came back to tell stories of places they had never spoken of before. This is the book of the second World War: Guam, Bataan, Corregidor, Guadalcanal, Midway, Morocco, Iwo Jima, Anzio, Kwajalein, Leyte, Normandy, Okinawa, Hiroshima.

Some went to these places and did not come back at all. Can we name them?

At my request, Wood County Veterans Service Officer Tom Stern has compiled as complete a document as records will allow of those soldiers who left the Wisconsin Rapids area for World War II and who were killed in action, missing in action, or died in service.

This is the book of the dead:

Douglas Conklin, Sydney Dye, Verlyn Ebert, Donald Failing, Joseph Grzanna, Edward Hasenohrl, Francis Hertel, Alexander Hinek, Charles Hladilek, Eugene Kohel, Orlando Krupka, Alden Lecy.

Dale Damitz, Laverne David, Glen Dickson, Phil Dittman, Neil Fahrner.

Gordon Firth, Charles Fitzgerald, John Flick, Gordon Galloway, Frank Giese, Ralph Gjertsen, Joe Goodrich, Leroy Hesse, Donald Holz, Alvin Jacoby.

Robert Kahoun, Henry Kedrowski, John Krehnke, Ernest Kronstedt, Richard Kruger, Robert Lamb, Donald Larson, Carl Leder, Anthony Martin, Gerald Mason, George Mathews, Jack Matthews, Charles Neinfeldt, Clifford Piney, Dennis Plowman, Francis Primeau, Elmer Putzier.

Edward Regan, Douglas Rezin, Leroy Ruder, Wallace Schuetz, George Schuman, John Simon, Eugene Smith, Harland Spry.

Dale Staege, Andrew Linzmeier, Howard Pagels.

Anthony Pankratz, Gordon Peik, Thomas Redmond, Hubert Richie, Bartley Roberts, Fred Schaaf, Norman Schilter, Clarence Schmidt, Wallace Schwarts.

Edmund Sternot, Irving Walsh, Robert Wunrow, Roger Arendt, Henry Bain, Victory Baldwin, Norbert Bathke, William Bauer, Joseph Bayerl, Elmer Blonion, Earl Breese, Donald Brehm, George Brown, Harold Brown, Bernard Buehler, Willard Burkhardt, Richard Carlson, Leland Cleveland, Clifford Cooper, John Corey, Howard Crowns, Keith Warner, James Watson, Erwin Weinbauer, Gerald Wipfli, Carroll Wolcott, Quentin Yager, Donald Zwicke.

Thomas Utegaard, Robert Bell, Harold Burwell, Charles Collier.

Phillip Davis, Charles Ellis.

Charles LaBrot, Virgil Lamb, John Lubben, Lee McAllister, Arnold Neises, James Perham.

Russell Reimer, Richard Rosebush, Frederick Severt, Sidney Waterman, Joseph White, James Havlena, Julius Rude.

They did not return.

Book of the Born

AFTER THE WAR: Immediately following the end of World War II in August 1945, typical Americans, such as those shown here, began building new houses, new families and new lives.

Even as men perished in foreign lands, so at home came a new generation into life. Can we name them?

At the office of the Wood County Register of Deeds are recorded Wisconsin Rapids-area births during August 1945.

This is the book of the born:

Terry Wayne Appleby, Joan Mary Boyles, Richard Earl Brundidge, Roberta Fern Braun.

Robert Keith Chonos, Roxine Marie Chonos, Francis Victor Coley, Iona Carol Dorshorst, Audrey Lee Dupee.

Peggy Jean Droste, Ralph Allen Diver, Paula Ann Dahlke, David Donald Engel, Peggy Joyce Frost, Gail Michelle Gouchee.

Diane Rae Grandkoski, Doris June Gellerman, Gerald William Ghiloni, Carole Mae Hoekstra, Lawrence Harry Jinsky, Jennifer Jane Johnson, Sharon Jeanne Kohnen.

Richard Wayne Kramer, Joyce Marie Lehner, James Thomas Lattimer, Robert Kenneth Lammers, Mary Elizabeth Levendorski, Diane Jane Mancl, Douglas Jean Molepski, Judith Lynn Moore.

Robert John McGinley, Karen Kristine Nelson, Sherry Gail Perschke, Georgia Ann Schneider, Nancy Dolores Sabota, Margaret Lee Stankey, Helen Florence Svoboda, Jane VanErt, Linda Ann White.

Bruce Anthony Zanow.

Nouveau Rapids

Once informal clusters of shacks along waterways, the communities of our area have become several defined centers amidst fairly amorphous but burgeoning residential zones. Census statistics compiled at the State Historical Society, Madison, demonstrate the dynamics of population in south Wood County.

Wisconsin Rapids, the primary center of industry, commerce and culture, showed a steady increase through every census until 1980.

The first census available is the 1840 territorial census. In a much larger Portage County, then including the present Wood County, lived 1,511 men, 1,014 between the ages of 20 and 30. There were 112 women.

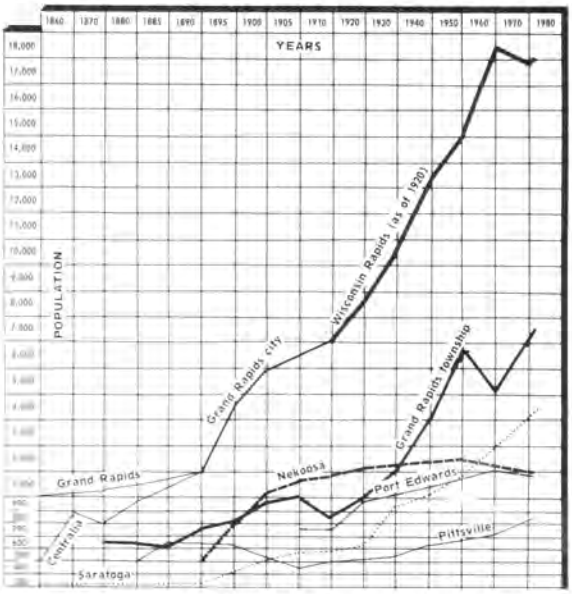
The "town" of Grand Rapids had been differentiated by the time of the 1850 national census with 265 males and 76 females. The only other communities hereabouts were Stevens Point, pop. 458 and Plover, pop. 451.

By 1860, the "town" or township of Centralia had been identified and tabulated at 484. Grand Rapids added one "colored" to 999 white for an even 1,000.

In 1870, the total population of Wood County was 3,912, 2,105 of whom were male. Centralia, 893, and Grand Rapids, 1,115, included 661 foreign-born.

Wood County in 1880 showed 6,346 U.S. born and 2,635 foreign-born, primarily from Great Britain and Germany. Newly incorporated Centralia city (1874) numbered 806 and Grand Rapids (1869) 1,350.

Population Trends in South Wood County



The 1885 state census showed Centralia with 497 males and 485 females, Grand Rapids city with 813 males and 793 females. The 1895 federal census enumerates Centralia at 1,435, Grand Rapids at 1,702.

Females outnumbered males in 1895 Grand Rapids 1,046 to 997. In Centralia were also more females, 1,049 to 990. This was the last census in which the twin-cities were separated.

Centralia, on the west bank, had clearly emerged as the industrial center. Centralia wages totaled $101,600 for 243 workers, Grand Rapids $9,153 for 45 workers. Pre-Consolidated Papers Inc. paper produces amounted to $224,000 annually, manufactured articles of wood $140,000 and flour milling $160,000, all in Centralia.

Grand Rapids annexed Centralia in 1900 for a combined population of 4,493. The continuing enumeration of the municipality since 1920 named Wisconsin Rapids follows:

1905: 6,157
1910: 6,521
1920: 7,243
1930: 8,726
1940: 11,416
1950: 13,496
1970: 18,587 (9,633 female)
1980: 17,995 (the only decline)

Nekoosa did not even exist prior to 1893 when it was built as an adjunct to the Nekoosa Paper Co. mill. It grew from 415 in 1895 to 1,099 in 1905, reaching its mature stage in 1930 at 2,005. The population of Nekoosa in 1980 was 2,159.

Neighboring Port Edwards, like Nekoosa, a mill-oriented town although with a long history, was first enumerated in 1910 with a population of 758, growing steadily until 1970 and a peak 2,126, declining to 2,077 in 1980.

While the established semi-urban centers of Nekoosa, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids have reached their population limits, surrounding semi-rural environs have showed major gains. Residential areas in sandy, septic-accepting subdivisions now serve as suburbs, like their larger counterparts in the Milwaukee and Madison areas.

Although often reduced by annexations to the city of Wisconsin Rapids, the township of Grand Rapids has, after a long period of stability, balooned. In 1880, the count was 656. In 1920, it was 825. Yet from 1930 to 1980, the land-diminished township numbered 7,319.

The growth of the township of Saratoga parallels that of Grand Rapids, remaining stable from 1860 (310) to 1930 (607) but by 1980 increasing to 4,363.

By contrast, the established commercial center of Pittsville counted 534 in 1885 and 556 in 1940. Minor gains have been recorded since toward 1980's high of 810.

As had Nekoosa, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids, Pittsville reached its potential in population growth. Henceforth, immigrants would look more to the lanes, courts and cul de sacs of the sand country.

Before the Boom

It was 8th Street, the highway out of here, a sometimes peaceful, sometimes dangerous two-lane strip that left my classmate's desk empty.

While I attended Two Mile School, the west edge of 8th Street was the eastern boundary of my walking territory. It also seemed the edge of civilization.

To Dave Patrykus, 8th Street meant home. Having grown up a decade earlier on nearby Two Mile Avenue, Patrykus, 730 11th St. N., knew old 8th Street well.

When Patrykus discovered the photographs on this page in the archives of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, he knew they would add perspective to ongoing plans for development.

Along with his pals in the Two Mile School gang, Dave Patrykus liked to go over behind Johnny and Ruby Dove's bar on 8th Street and watch the free movies. The free outdoor flicks provided a sort of moveable feast for families of the 1940s. Ma and Pa would have a couple of beers in the bar while the kids munched popcorn and stared through the dust at "Tom Mix," "Laurel and Hardy" or "Custer's Last Stand."

"Invariably, the movie would be going and somebody would trip over the cord," Patrykus said this week in his Wisconsin Department of Transportation office at 1681 2nd Ave. S. "Everyone would start blowing the horn and raising hell until it started again."

Johnny and Ruby's place burned long ago, to be replaced by the tavern known for years as Lucky Lager's. Just north, between the present Ruby and Dove avenues on the west side of Highway 13 South, or "8th Street," is the site of the proposed K-mart store.

A fenced area on the K-mart site, behind the concrete building then used by Warsinske Motors, stored Mrs. George Mead I's old electric car, complete with bud vases in the windows, said Patrykus.

After World War II, Clarence Brave showed movies at his root beer stand, south of Two Mile Avenue. Rapids Rental now occupies the spot.

Patrykus and a friend were at Brave's one day when the friend's younger brother begged for a root beer. "Ah, go on home," he was told. Running across 8th Street, he was struck by a car and killed.

Looking north, Grand Avenue intersection