



Artifacts



Cover: Lida and Lewis M. Alexander in the Holy Land. Phil Brown "from here," by Uncle Dave, p. 2-3; Parmeter's Golden Eagle, 4-7; Golden Eagle moonshine, 8; Golden Eagle ads, 9-10; Panter photo, 11; Terrace Gardens, 12-13; Bill Sachs by Jim Sachs, 14-15; 1969 flood play, 16-17; Port Edwards founding women by Alison Bruener, 18-27; Jennie Monson by Uncle Dave, 28-31; Pauline Alexander, 30; Gib pix, 32.

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Andalwagam 1973

By Uncle Dave
Artifacts Editor

The “From Here” Award

Municipal factotum finally accomplishes something

Since 1983, when Rapids mayor James Kubisiak named me City Historian, I’ve been looking for an opportunity to wield those formidable powers in an unforgettable and lasting way.

As fellow gasbag Diedrich Knickerbocker pronounced in the first *River City Memoirs* book, “What important beings are we historians! We are the sovereign censors who decide upon the renown or infamy of our fellow mortals—we are the benefactors of kings—we are the guardians of truth—we are the scourgers of guilt—we are the instructors of the world.”

True but aspirational. Fortunately, an opportunity came along to accomplish something in the real world, something that would alter the past and future in what we antiquarians call “one fell swoop.”

The story begins with my mother-in-law, Kay Stewart, a Marshfield native and childhood playmate of long-time congressman and former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird. After graduating from Point college, Kay became a teacher in Gillett, Wis., and then Oconto, Wis., donning the mantle of historical society president and award-winning local historian. When she died in 1990 at 66, a big crowd coursed through the Gallagher funeral parlor. “A lot of people knew her,” opined her second husband, an Oconto fixture all his life, “for a girl from out of town.”

Kay had only been in town 43 years. She would never be “from here.”

Also “43 years” I have lived in this house and 48 at the postal address, “Rudolph, Wis.” Yet, the newborn neighbor boy, Liam VandenVandenschlagen, is “from here” as I never will be. I am “from Rapids.”

As historian, I like to count up the numbers, which are getting pretty high. Now, 37 years after the City Historian fete, a second honor has come my way, happily one that led me to the best use possible of my office.

On March 4, 2020, the Heart of Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce named me “2019 Citizen of the Year,” essentially as a lifetime achievement award. I knew only one person who could have made that happen: SWCHC president, Philip M. Brown, “the chief.”

Phil has lived in the Wisconsin Rapids vicinity since January 1980, 40 years ago, the same month I first darkened the door of Joe Karius, *Tribune* editor. Since then, Phil has been involved in almost every community project of importance. He is 2013 Citizen of the Year and could be citizen of every year.

Yet, ask anyone and they will tell you sadly that Phil is not “from here.” Our #1 civic booster was born on the wrong side of the St. Croix and attended a high school you can’t say the name of without laughing.

Fortunately, I corrected Phil’s problem with 400 witnesses at the Chamber awards banquet, proclaiming, under the authority vested in me by the municipality, Philip MacNeil Brown, with all the emoluments and privileges contained in those words, to be “From Here.”



Locally-born Paul Gross, Marshall Buehler and Uncle Dave Engel, are, according to SWCHC president Phil Brown, the Churchill, Roosevelt and Zeppo of local history



Now all from here, “Citizens of the Year” SWCHC president Phil Brown, left, with UD and Marshall Buehler



**No matter where you go,
there you are**

Motto of Walter Parmeter

Rick (1967), Marlace, Walter, Tod
(1963), Jay (1960) Parmeter

Walter: I never really knew what I was doing. But I worked hard. I had a dream that goes back to when I was a kid. I went to my grandpa's farm in Oconto Falls; they had a log house...

The Golden Eagle Family

Interviewing Walter, Marlace and Jay Parmeter

SWCHC president Phil Brown talked with Walter and Marlace Parmeter at Golden Eagle Log and Timber Homes, 4421 Plover Road, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., on Feb. 12, 2020. Also participating was Jay Parmeter, son of Wally and Marlace.

As told to Phil, edited for *Artifacts*.

Walter Parmeter, 87, was born June 8, 1932, at Riverview Hospital in Wisconsin Rapids, son of Walter V. and Genevieve (Duffy) Parmeter.

"We lived on 16th Street, up by Robinson Park. My dad was building a home at the time on 1750 1st St. N., three blocks north of the tracks. My mother was from Oconto Falls, Wis., and my dad was born in Rapids. He worked in the Biron Mill.

"I was the oldest of six kids. Larry, Roger and me. And three sisters, Leanne, Jean and Janet. I went to grades one through eight at Saint Peter and Paul.

"You've got to be interested in what you're doing and I was not interested in school. When I was about twelve, I worked for the Daly ice company. The ice was

cut from the river and then they would store it in a shed near the Green Bay and Western tracks, 25, 50 and 100 pound blocks of ice that had to be cleaned and sized before I brought it into their ice box. People would put out a sign when they needed ice.

"I went to Lincoln high school—class of 1951. Spent four years in the Navy and was in Korea until 1954.

"I grew up boxing. I fought at the neighbor's boxing ring. That was Charlie Ellis and he went on to box for the University of Wisconsin. I was on an aircraft carrier and I was an all-service champion boxer. I won a boxing trophy in Hong Kong.

"My first job when I came back was Sampson Canning. About five years later, I got into real estate with my dad. He had left the mill and got into real estate and insurance.

"I married Marlace in 1959 when she was working at Consolidated in the office."

Photos courtesy of Luke Parmeter, videographer



Marlace Jackan Parmeter

Marlace, 83, daughter of Luke and Viola Jackan, was born Oct. 10, 1936, in a house on Third Street North, Wisconsin Rapids, "up by Preway."

"My mother was born in Milladore and my dad was born in the Rudolph area. My dad worked in the Rapids paper mill. I had one sister who was almost eight years older than me. I went to S.S. Peter and Paul grade school and Lincoln high school. I was a pretty good student. I tried hard and I knew I had to get a job. Before I graduated, I started working in the mill as a private secretary. George Nelson was one of my bosses.

"I knew Wally a little bit from school. I was a freshman and he was a senior. I knew his sister real well. So I knew who he was, but we actually met at a bar. We were married in 1959 at S.S. Peter and Paul.

"The first year we were married was pretty rough. Wally would clean garages for people and take the bottles and cans and sell them and turn it into money so he could buy formula for me to use.

"Also at that time, if you got pregnant, you had to quit working at the mill. Once you started wearing maternity clothes, you were done.

"We built a little duplex off of Third Street and rented out the second floor to Paul Gross. He was just



Marlace and mom Viola Jackan



Wally, Sis, Jean and Janet Parmeter

married and lived above us for about three years. We then built a spec ['speculative,' to be sold] home on Poplar Street that was a little bigger."

Wally: "As a realtor, I had the Golden Eagle listed in 1969 and the guy who owned it, Joe Goodwin, said that he didn't want much money down on it. [Goodwin died in 1970.] He said a hundred and I said, 'I won't charge you commission,' so I just took over. It was a beer bar that could serve 18-year-olds. We were busy and I never knew what the hell I was doing until I got 'er done. The kids wanted a place to dance, so I put a dance hall on the back. And I built Jammer's and moved the dance hall.

"We had opened Panel It in 1966. I ran the tavern at night and worked at Panel It during the day. I had good guys working for me. The best guy I had was an alcoholic. Nobody else would hire him. He built a house for me and I sold it. Then I went to the tavern to meet with him, had a beer and gave him \$1,000. I told him that for every house he built for me, I would give him \$1,000."

"Panel It" Factory Outlet
For pre-finished paneling
3241 Hwy. 54 East, Wisconsin Rapids

1967 ad in *Daily Tribune*

Jay Parmeter: “Instead of dry walling the spec homes, they would put in paneling to speed up the building process. Dad would write on the walls, ‘Panel it.’ That’s how Panel It got its name. Mom was at home and people would come over and buy leftover paneling. So the store idea came from that.

“The first Panel It was on the north side of Highway 54 at 32nd Street. Around 1975, he built the new Panel It where the Golden Eagle was.

“So the spec home business was winding down. Panel It and Golden Eagle tavern were going gang busters and then there was the Love Creek tavern towards Plover on the river.

“At Love Creek was a little bitty bar about 10-feet-long in the living room of an old farm house. Dad knocked that down and there was an old granary out there. He added onto that and made that into a tavern. Next thing you know, that’s a hoppin’ joint too. It’s on the river, you got boats, snowmobiles, etc.

“But these guys would just hire others to run it and when they got sick of doing that, around 1980, he

turned it into a house and sold it. Then they built a log house up there next to the granary and that’s where they lived. There was lots going on.

“I started working at Panel It in 1973 and I have been here since then.

“It was a real family affair. I grew up in that neighborhood across from Kwik Trip where Dad had built about 30 to 40 spec homes. That’s where we lived. I lived in four different houses in that neighborhood.

“Dad was really brilliant in buying property at a good price, developing it and making some money when it was sold.

“The Panel It building is part of the new Golden Eagle Log and Timber Homes building. There have been lots of additions to it.

“There is only so much paneling we could sell. We started selling doors and windows. Sold a ton of cedar lumber. In 1985 or ’86, dad bought a big log milling machine and then things started to change.

“Dad built his first model home, 16 by 36. We built a 1,500 square house and that was pretty nice. Then we built another 1,500 square-foot model house out here. We called them ‘eaglets.’ Our accountant looked at our books and said that one of you guys should probably pay attention to the log home business. So I took over working out of the model house.

“We thought about changing the name to Parmeter Log Homes, but the Golden Eagle name goes well here, so we kept it.”



Wally Parmeter, right, in an early promotion

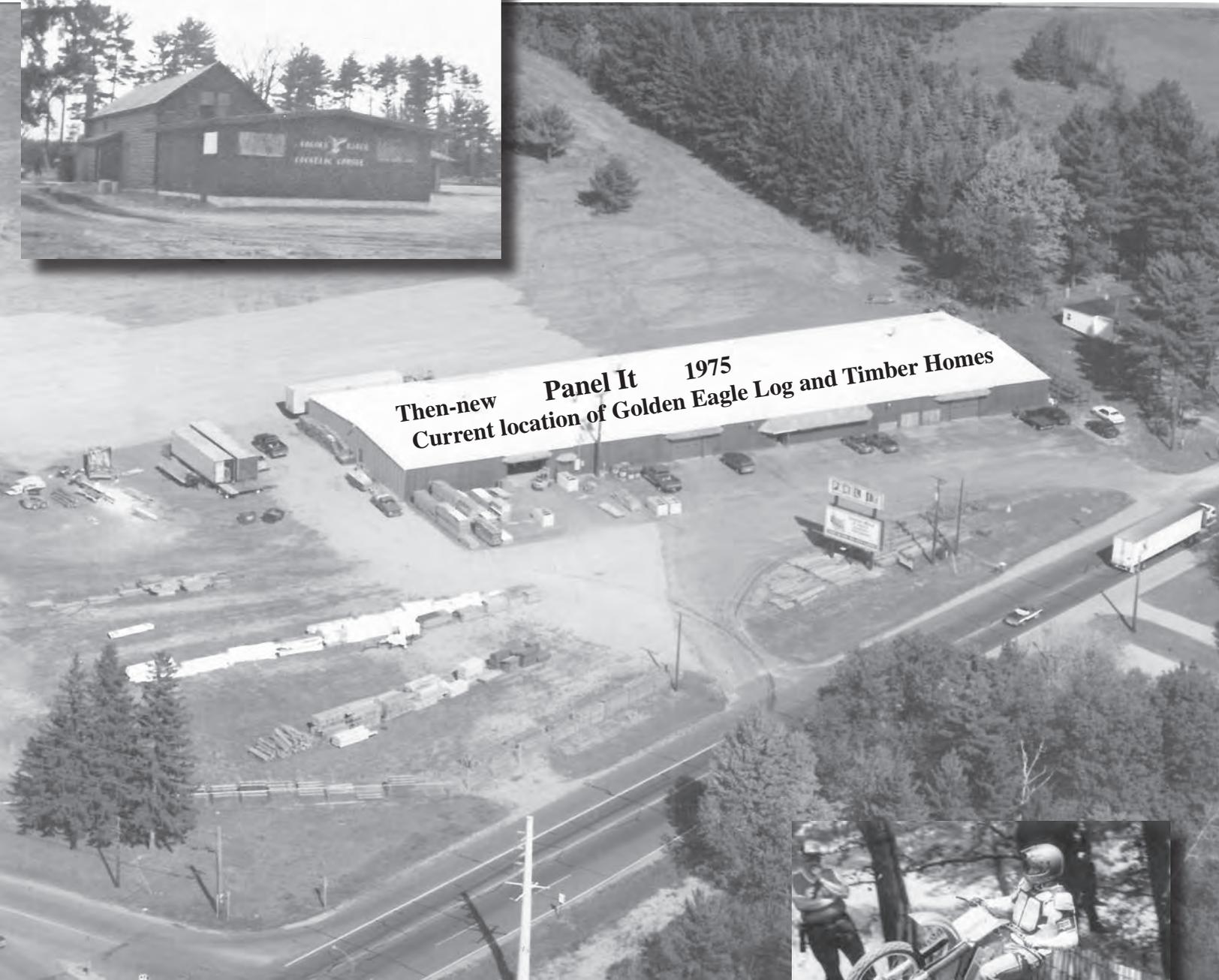


1967

Golden Eagle "Cocktail Lounge," 1960s



Then-new Panel It 1975
Current location of Golden Eagle Log and Timber Homes



1991 "Building Center"



Jay Parmeter: "When we started racing motorcycles around 1977, we would work during the week, go to church on Saturday night and then drive to various motorcycle races where all three of us boys would race." Shown is Tod at a hillclimb.

Always a full moon at the Golden Eagle

By Uncle Dave

A 1909 atlas did not show a parcel of bar-friendly property at what is now Highway 54 and Eagle Road but by 1928, the tavern site was clearly delineated. The first owner of the future Golden Eagle was Abner Atwood, who, in 1916 “sold his saloon on the Plover road about two miles northeast of the [Grand Rapids] city” to C.F. Rosenberger of Stevens Point.

Civil War vet Atwood was listed in the 1910 census as a farmer but adjacent on the census form was a saloon owner, Nicholas Thomas, former husband of Ella Atwood, who would continue in the bar biz.

In 1918, noted the local paper, there would be two fewer saloons in the town of Grand Rapids, one on the “sand hill,” the other being the Golden Eagle. Both were refused a license as authorities took advantage of what the newspaper called the “Baker law,” perhaps referring to proto-Prohibition suppression.

The U.S. entered World War I in 1917. In 1918, Charles Frank Rosenberger, RFD 1, Grand Rapids, registered for the draft as a saloon keeper working for himself. His card was signed by Frank Whitrock, of *Artifacts* 57 fame.

About that time, Rosenberger, proprietor of the **Golden Eagle Cafe** “east of Grand Rapids on the Stevens Point road,” was charged with selling “moonshine” at his place of business. Perhaps because saloons had been outlawed that year, in the 1920 census, he called himself a “storekeeper.”

Another saloon man who registered for the draft was Joseph Edward Goodwin of Embarrass, Wis., a Shawano county, Wis., native.

Violating Prohibition laws in 1922 were 14 “roadhouse” proprietors, including Wm. Bodette, James Mason, W.H. Habeck, Leslie Goodwin of the Goodwin Inn (Hoop-E-Doo), probably the same sand hill bar mentioned before, and Joe Goodwin of the **Golden Eagle Buffet** “on highway 66 on the Stevens Point road at the end of the Wood county concrete.” Joe Schneider was now proprietor of the old Nick Thomas place on the Kellner road. C.F. “Shrub” Rosenberger was up on Wood’s Hill, near Nekoosa.

In August 1922, Mrs. Joe Goodwin died, having been a patient for two years at the Wausau hospital. (Goodwin married Nelda Habeck of Wisconsin Rapids in 1929.)

In 1922, a raid on the Eagle “roadhouse” by Sheriff W.C. Mueller and two federal agents revealed a

quantity of moonshine whiskey and resulted in the arrest of Joe Goodwin, the proprietor, and Harold Goodwin, who was in charge when the raid was made.

In 1923, Joseph Goodwin was arrested with numerous second and third offenders for violating liquor laws. Leslie Goodwin, named as proprietor of the Golden Eagle, was in court to answer a second charge of illegal sale and possession of liquor. In a long story of a moveable “orgy,” a man and woman traveled from Nekoosa at the C.F. Rosenberger saloon in the town of Port Edwards through Rapids and to the **Golden Eagle saloon** where they purchased several more drinks before traveling on to another place at Meehan Station.

1924: “In sentencing Goodwin to pay a fine of \$750 plus costs on three counts, Judge B.B. Park placed the heaviest fine against the defendant that has ever been levied in circuit court in Wood county on a liquor violation charge.” Goodwin promised “to leave the liquor business alone in this county.” Leslie Goodwin had been fined \$500 on two counts for the same offense at his Sand Hill bar, Hoop-E-Doo.

In 1927, Joe Goodwin, prop. of **Golden Eagle “roadhouse,”** was sentenced to serve five months in the Milwaukee Jail for selling moonshine whiskey and beer. Three years later, he announced the sale of **Golden Eagle Buffet** to William A. Bodette. Goodwin said he planned to leave for Clintonville, Wis., to operate a farm he owned.

In 1931, the Golden Eagle, “a popular roadhouse” was padlocked following a raid by the feds that turned up only the sale of one “gin buck” or gin and ginger ale. The next year, Bodette was sentenced to 90 days in jail for violating Prohibition laws.

In June 1940, five taverns in the Wisconsin Rapids area were charged with violation of state law forbidding the sale of liquor between the hours of 1 a.m. and 8 a.m., including Joe Goodwin of the Golden Eagle. In August, an ad in the *Tribune* offered: “Golden Eagle Windmill Barbecue Stand/Cheap if taken at once. Phone 776.”

The Golden Eagle continued to be owned by Joe Goodwin as shown in 1960 when he and Lester Habeck applied for a liquor license and in 1969 was sold to Walter Parmeter.

See August 2005 Artifacts for John Billings’ memories of the Golden Eagle.

How about some famous recipe?



**NOW READY
TO SERVE YOU**
at the
**“Windmill”
Barbecue**
Under the Management of the
Golden Eagle Buffet
Highway 54 ON THE ROAD
TO FLOYER
Delicious Ham, Beef, Pork and Chicken
Bar-B-Q Sandwiches—Also Ice-Cream,
Confectionery and Tobaccos
CONVENIENT FREE PARKING OFF
THE HIGHWAY
DEEP ROCK GASOLINE
AND OILS
**THE
Golden Eagle Buffet**

1930

Ads throughout the 1930s and 1940s show Bar-B-Q, Bar-B-Que, Barbeque and Barbecue were a highlight at the Golden Eagle. The Parmeters bought the recipe from the Goodwins for \$1,000 and haven't divulged it, though versions are in circulation, including the one at right, provided by (Uncle) Dave Patrykus. It came down from Nelda Goodwin to her cousin's daughter Barbara Miller.



**A Toast to Your Friendship
and Sincere Best Wishes
FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS**
We appreciate the opportunity of serving
you with the Finest Whiskies, Wines, Mixed
Drinks and Beers.
Golden Eagle Barbeques
are available all winter. Merely drive up
to the tavern, blow your horn and get curb
service.
GOLDEN EAGLE
TAVERN AND BAR-BE-QUE
Highway 54 East

1934

**Greetings
for the New Year!**
Best Wishes for Health, Happiness
and Prosperity for All in 1949!
Come Out And See Us New
Year's Eve!
Delicious Holiday Special!
**HOT
BUTTERED RUM** 
and
TOM & JERRY'S
We appreciate the opportunity of serving you
with the Finest whiskeys, wines, Mixed Drinks
and Beers.
Try a Famous
Golden Eagle BAR-B-QUE!
Tender — Tasty and So Delicious
Your Choice of PORK or BEEF
GOLDEN EAGLE TAVERN
Highway 54 East Joe Goodwin and Leon David, Proprietors

1948

Stop At
The Golden Eagle
For Delicious
Pork and Beef
Barbecues
AT
ONLY **10¢**
WHY NOT TRY OUR
FANCY MIXED DRINKS?

1941



Join the
**Cranboree
Crowd**
at the
**GOLDEN
EAGLE**
Rt. 1 East on 54
For Your Favorite
Drink and the Best
Barbecue in Town
We will be looking for you.

1954

Golden Eagle Barbeque Sauce Recipe

3 Cups Hunts Catsup “Nelda always used Hunts.”
3 Tablespoons dry mustard
1½ teaspoons ground pepper
1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
½ cup cider vinegar

Mix dry mustard, pepper and enough vinegar together to make a thin paste. Mix all ingredients together and bring to a “good” boil. Then: “turn to low and simmer for a while.” Makes about one quart.

Editor testifies to trying numerous recipes with a familiar flavor yet not duplicating the fragrant spice of freedom on a summer night in the 1960s under the pines with a carload of band-mates at the Golden Eagle barbecue shack.

The New Golden Eagle

Not your grandma's cup of Ripple wine—or is it?

A popular local band.

LIVE MUSIC
at the
GOLDEN EAGLE
Tonite and Saturday Night
The Psychos
Golden Eagle

ENTERTAINMENT
Friday and
Saturday
They're Back
You Know They Are
Great
"RAW MEAT"
Don't Miss Them
GOLDEN

ENTERTAINMENT
Back By
Popular Demand
Friday and
Saturday
Only
**"AUSTRALIAN
VAMPS"**
A Fabulous All
Girl Band
**GOLDEN
EAGLE**
Hwy. 54 East

LIVE MUSIC
at the
GOLDEN EAGLE
Friday and Saturday Night
Featuring:
THE ZOO
from Milwaukee
Parmeter's
Golden Eagle

1968

**STARTING
TOMORROW**
The
**Jules Blattner
Group**
Returns to the
Golden Eagle
June 9 thru 14
At last year's appearance at
the Golden Eagle, we had to
turn people away. This year
we are ready for everyone
with our new addition. Won't
Jules be surprised?
at the
GOLDEN EAGLE
Hwy. 54 East

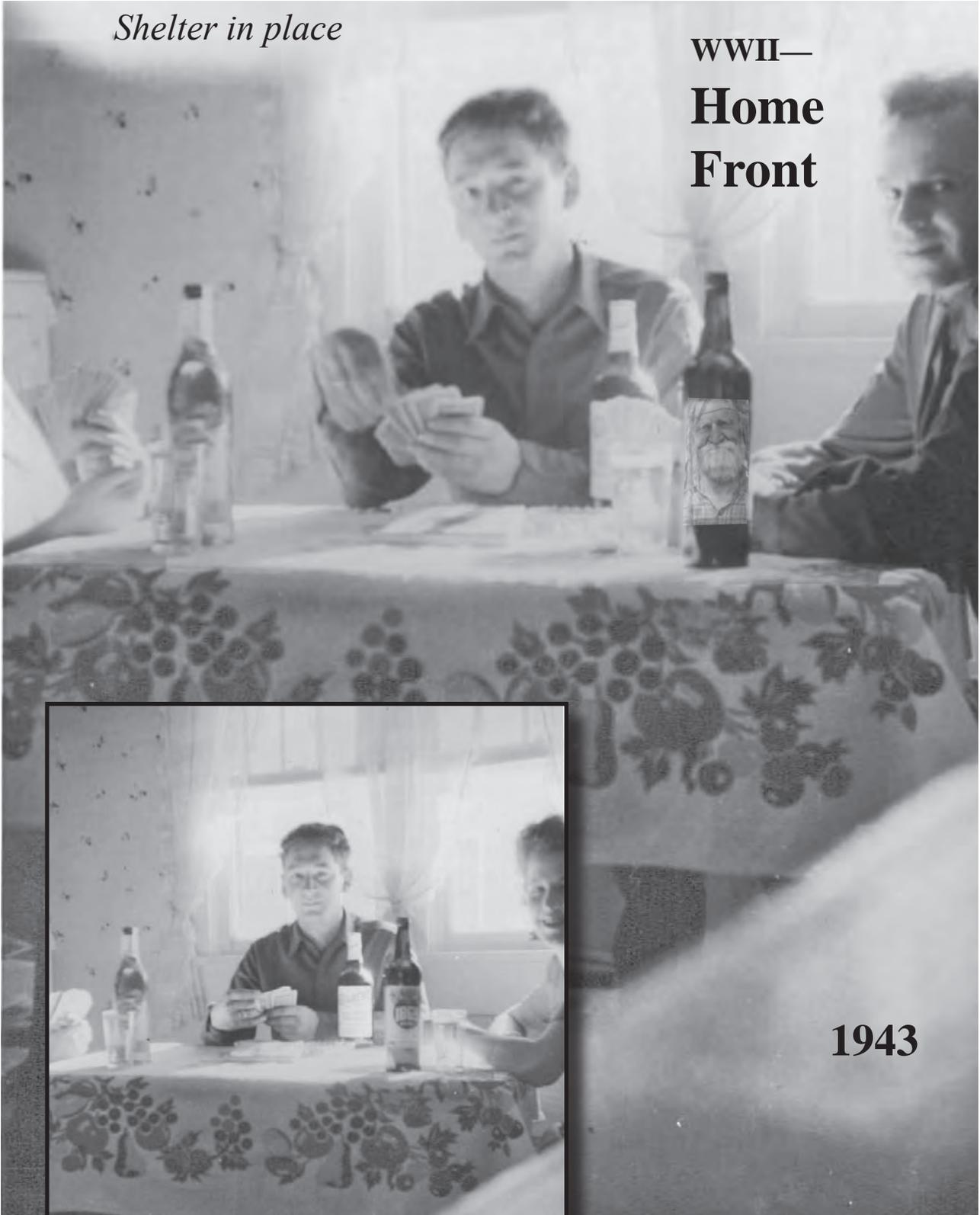
The sensitivities of the post-Beatles generation are shown by the names of musical groups they favored in 1970.

A well known and more classically-titled band from St. Louis

Feature Photo

Shelter in place

WWII—
**Home
Front**



1943

Courtesy of Cheryl Panter

By Uncle Dave

Terrace Gardens

Where the action was on 8th Street

The 1970 ad for “The Terrace” appeared side-by-side with the Golden Eagle’s and another for a “Y dance” at the Port Edwards YMCA, the multi-purpose facility that the Alexanders, profiled in this issue, were most responsible for.

“Terrace Gardens” was a bar/cocktail lounge at 2410 8th Street S., possibly where the CVS pharmacy parking lot is currently located. It was occasionally visited by your own Uncle Dave, then in his 20s, mainly on nights when there was live music. Terrace owner and Zakons drummer Gerry Irwin frequently extended a friendly greeting much as he did back at Grove School when Irwin, as a seasoned drummer, welcomed the neophyte cornet player now your editor.

The Terrace, a couple blocks east and slightly south of the Grove School, was already open in 1958, when UD was in 7th and 8th grades. That’s when a *Daily Tribune* reporter talked to Willard Russ, the owner, as he was opening up for business.

“This plush new night spot looks just as good when the lights are turned up bright! As we padded after him over the softly carpeted floors we saw the 14-stool bar, the corner cocktail lounge, the table-studded rooms and the dance floor. Nearly 100 persons can enjoy the entertainment and subdued atmosphere without jostling each other.” There was a piano and space for a jazz combo.

The building, which had been given a redwood and stone facade outside, had housed Rusty’s Bridal Salon until the remodeling some six months previous. “Rusty” was the nickname of both Russ and his wife, Mrs. Rusty.

The two Rustys also operated a bridal shop at Wausau, Wis., and had operated Club 8 as a night club, which, at the time of the 1958 account, was Wilbern’s about-to-be fine dining. The Russes had also built and operated Club 9 here, the story said. What and where was Club 9?

In 1960, the Terrace was included in a roundup of local bars. “Other favorite night spots which are new to the 8th St. S. scene are the Terrace Gardens, built

two years ago as primarily a night club, and Pasquales which has recently undergone conversion from a tavern to a supper club.”

Willard Russ, 46, died in 1963 at Veterans Hospital, Madison, Wis. His obituary said the WWII vet had come to Rapids in 1946.

A 1963 *Tribune* reported that, established in 1960 and recently remodeled, Terrace Gardens was owned by Mrs. Willard (Rusty) Russ and offered modern, soft-lighted decor, musical entertainment, charcoal steaks grilled on an open hearth and a unique salad bar overseen by chef Lee “Rocky” Curtis from the Eau Claire Holiday Inn, with Roger Ebbe at the bar.

It wasn’t long before the Terrace Gardens Supper Club was sold at public auction, “a going business,” with a beautifully-furnished cocktail lounge, two large dining rooms and a well-equipped kitchen.

In 1965, “food and frolic” were the bill of fare at the “New Terrace Gardens” under the ownership of Fritz (Frank) and Lillian (Pehoski) Sliva from Stevens Point. The cook was Mrs. Pat Kronstedt.

“Sensing the wish for ‘live’ entertainers, Sliva regularly booked “rock ’n roll bands and ‘go-go girls’ to make it a mecca for those who want to go ‘where the action is.’”

In September 1967, Terrace Gardens was purchased from the Slivas by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Irwin. Gerry had been a drummer in the Zakons rock ’n’ roll band but in 1967 was with the Mod Four, and had frequently played at Terrace Gardens.

In 1971, Glen Pilling applied to Mineral Point, Wis., for a liquor license for the bar that, in 1972, was still owned by Sliva—but was in process of being sold to Robert Pilling, manager of Gritzmacher’s bowling alley and bar and to William Pilling.

The sale became problematic when the joint, like many a bar in transition, was destroyed by fire. The cause was believed to have been defective wiring.

From the photo at right, Terrace Gardens doesn’t seem like much to look at from the outside but sometimes it was pretty posh on the inside.

1970 Daily Tribune

American Bandstand, Rapids

ENTERTAINMENT

Friday and Saturday
"THE ZAKONS 70"
They are great
and
"WENDY"
Another great exotic
Dancer and Entertainer
Closed Sundays

The Terrace
Eighth Street South

HIGH SCHOOL DANCE

at the
YMCA Community Center
Jan. 3, 8:00 to 11:30 P.M.
"THE MOON"
(proper school dress required)

The Census Bureau representative in this area is Mrs. Mildred L. Albert, 1420 Woodbine St.

GREAT ENTERTAINMENT
Two Big Bands
Saturday, Jan. 3
at the
Golden Eagle
"THE ROBBs"

Nationally famous TV Stars on the American Bandstand 36 times

- Noted to be the best looking group in the country
- Most popular band in the midwest

Just a few of their song hits:
"Race With the Wind"
"Rapid Transit"
"Bitter Sweet"
"Changing Winds"
"I Don't Want to Discuss It!"
"Movin' "

Plus
THA
Don't Miss These Groups
THE GOLDEN EAGLE
Lots & Lots of Room

The Robbs, from Oconomowoc, Wis., were regular performers on Where the Action Is during late 1966 and early 1967, replacing Paul Revere and the Raiders. In 1970, they played the Golden Eagle right here in River City.

The band had enjoyed regional success, mostly in and around Milwaukee, Wis. Their 1966 single "Race With The Wind" was a hit in Chicago.

In 1975, the three Robb Brothers opened Cherokee Studios in Los Angeles. Their clients included The Go-Gos (with Jane Wiedlin, also born in Oconomowoc), Jane's Addiction, Steely Dan, Aerosmith, Devo, Public Enemy, Lenny Kravitz, John Cougar (later Mellen-camp), Al Green and Warren Zevon.

Mostly from Wikipedia...

Terrace Gardens on fire



April 27, 1972

MY DAD, BILL SACHS

By Jim Sachs

William Benjamin Sachs, “Willie,” was born Aug. 14, 1906, in Danzig, Germany. With his mom and dad, sisters Helen and Gertrude and brother Karl, he migrated to the U.S. in 1910. He was confirmed at St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran church here in 1919. He told me he felt “called” to become a Lutheran pastor and studied for that profession at Northwestern College in Wauwatertown, Wis., where he played on the baseball team.

Dad graduated on June 13, 1929, and was ready to enroll in seminary when his father passed away unexpectedly. Dad set aside his plans and went home to help support his family. He never looked back and spent the rest of his working life at Consolidated Papers. At the same time he remained active at St. Paul’s, serving in many lay positions. His mom remarried and his family grew to include new brothers Otto, Emil, Don, George and sister Gertrude.

Because I did not ask, I don’t know how he met Miss Clara Wittenberg. They were married Nov. 24, 1934.

Somewhere along the way, Dad developed a life-long friendship with his new brother-in-law, Herb Wittenberg. Lots of stories circulated about their baseball talents as they played semi-pro ball around the state. They told me several times they would have made it to the big leagues except for their “sinus” problems. What they meant was nobody would “sign us.” As Clara’s brother and sisters married, new family names became part of what was called the Wittenberg clan: Paul and Renata Bushmaker, Ed and Emily Fandek, Herb and Beata Wittenberg and Thelma Wittenberg.

Shortly after my birth, March 17, 1942, my mother came down with tuberculosis and spent about five years at River Pines in Whiting, Wis. During that time, I lived with my uncle Herb and aunt Beata Wittenberg while Dad kept our family and home afloat.

One of my first memories is my dad taking me to visit River Pines and looking up at Mom in a second floor window because I was not permitted contact with her. When she returned home, her life was very restricted because one lung had been removed.

I believe my family did anything and everything any other family did at that time. We just did it slower and more carefully. Our life centered on the church and the Wittenberg clan. As my cousins grew up, left home and took on their own lives, the core of the clan, the older sisters and brother, stayed in Wisconsin Rapids for the rest of their lives.

In 1967, I was living at home and had just started what became a 35-year career at Sentry Insurance in Stevens Point when my mom’s health went on a downward spiral until she passed away at the hospital in Marshfield of heart failure. For whatever reason, I had stepped out of the room for a few minutes. When I returned she was gone. Dad was sitting next to the bed holding her hand. That was the only time I saw him cry.

By 1969, I had married and moved to Plover to be closer to work. So, then my dad was again living alone at 151 18th Ave. S. He was presented with his first and only grandchild, my daughter Tracy, in 1970. The pictures I have of him with her showed the best smiles on his face that I had ever seen.

In 1971, when the Hafermann Homestead opened, he and brother-in-law Herb played a lot golf out there. They also spent some time at the Homestead supper club along with Bubbles Bar on the corner of 17th Avenue and West Grand Avenue. About this time, he became active with the local professional baseball team, the Wisconsin Rapids Twins. He served on the board of directors and he enjoyed that a lot.

What came next was a huge change in his life. On an AARP bus trip to Michigan, a new lady came into his life. He met Bernice (Palmquist) DeKarske and they began spending time with each other. There was less time spent at Homestead playing golf and more time with Bernice. Then one day in the summer of 1975 he and I were sitting in Bernice’s backyard at 711 Dale St. and he asked me if it was okay with me if he and Bernice got married.

Certainly, it was okay. They were married Oct. 25, 1975, at St. Paul’s Lutheran church. Their marriage truly added some happy years to both of their lives.

Before he met Bernice, Dad experienced a heart situation while golfing with Herb at Homestead. He told



Bill Sachs at CPI retirement



Jim and Bill Sachs at Bidwell's grocery, 1710 W. Grand Ave. Bidwell's was "kitty corner" from Edison school, Hamm's Sinclair and the Hudson dealership.

us he did not have a heart attack. However, he was told he had an enlarged heart. Then one day in October 1983 while shopping with Bernice, he had a massive heart attack and spent his last days at Riverview Hospital in Rapids. Everyone in his family past and present had an opportunity to stop by to see him. On the evening of October 22, I received a call saying that I should get over to Riverview as soon as I could. He passed away before I got there. I regret not getting to say good bye.

I would like to wrap up this story with some of my favorite memories of Dad.

The first was at my cousin Gary Fandek's wedding in the Milwaukee area. Gary's dad, Ed, hardly ever missed a Milwaukee Braves game on the radio. The radio voice of the Braves, Earl Gillespie, was a friend of the family Gary married into—and was at the wedding reception. My Dad and Uncle Herb decided to ask Earl to give Uncle Ed the surprise of his life. So Earl got behind Ed and yelled out one of his game ending play by play calls with a "Holy Cow!" at the end. At that point Ed's life was complete.

The second memory was a trip Dad took with Ray Burchell to a Minnesota Twins ball game. Ray was president and Dad was on the board of directors for the Twins farm team in Rapids. After the game against the Oakland "A's," they were permitted into an owner's lounge. Joe DiMaggio was a bench coach for the A's

and was sitting in the lounge. So Dad talked to him. After his return, he held out his right hand saying he shook hands with Joe DiMaggio and probably would not wash that hand any time soon.

Last memory. Back in the day when the softball diamond was finished at Mead Field on 17th Avenue in Rapids, the first game was going to be between two Consolidated Papers pickup teams.

Dad announced he was coming out of retirement for the game. Mom had a bad feeling about the whole thing and said she was not going to the game. So in the 18th Avenue backyard Dad and I did some basic practicing, fielding some ground balls, playing catch and even some pepper. He seemed ready for the game.

Dad was the third batter in the first inning. He lined the first pitch, which hopped the fence in right center. After a couple steps towards first, he took a header in the baseline. Then he started laughing and could not get up. The score book showed he was out 9-to-4-to-3.

We had forgotten to do some pre-game running. Seems Mom was right to stay home for this one.



Bill, Jim and Clara Sachs

Like so many of us, I wish my Dad and I talked more. With that being said, I was able to document a lot of facts from his early life and, since I am now 77, I thought I better write about this now.

Happy Days Not Long Past

Photo from Daily Tribune,
scanned by C.H. Bruse

June 1969
West Side near river



Flood!

SPEED
LIMIT
25

90 MIN.
PARKING
LIMIT
DAYS
2A



By Alison Bruener
SWCHC Museum Staff

As a member of the last kindergarten class of the 20th century in the Port Edwards school district, I adored hearing stories of those who came before such as Ed Heuer, a former elementary teacher, who came to our second grade class to share village history. I liked visiting the Alexander House in third grade, and finally entering fifth grade and walking the “main” hall of the John Edwards high school. As my mother worked on the school newsletter, my brothers and I pored over the yearbooks kept in the main office. Now, in this research, I am honored to learn about the families behind the names seen on plaques around the town I grew up in.

Port Edwards’ Founding Family: The Women

It began 180 years ago, when John Edwards Sr., of Hazel Green, Wis., and his partner, Henry Clinton, bought a sawmill in Frenchtown, Wis., now the village of Port Edwards. In 1896, John Edwards Jr. built the paper mill that would support the community surrounding it for many years.

If the men were known for their industry and business, what actions and interests did their wives and daughters have, and how did they impact the community of Port Edwards?



SWCHC

Frances J. Morrill Edwards

Frances Morrill Edwards (1831-1921)

Frances Jane Morrill was born in Canaan, Vt., May 5, 1831, to Levi and Sophronia Morrill, a family whose American history extended back before the Revolution. At an early age, Frances is reported to have shown a passion for education, music and religion, beginning a teaching career in Lancaster and Bethlehem, N.H.

In 1856, when she was 25, Frances joined her parents in their move to Prairie du Sac, Wis., eight years after Wisconsin became a state.

Three years later, the Morrills followed the Wisconsin river north to Centralia (twin city of Grand Rapids) where her father built a sawmill. Frances, known to friends as “Fanny,” taught in the Centralia school and gave music lessons on her melodeon brought from Vermont, noted by Orson Cochran to be “the first instrument of its kind to come into the thriving little town on the Wisconsin river.”

Frances continued to teach in Grand Rapids and Centralia for two years, until she was tempted to move down the river to Frenchtown, which she later described. “Our town was small, having one dry goods and mercantile store, a large boarding house, sleeping house, blacksmith shop, schoolhouse and a sufficient number of homes for its inhabitants.”

A decade after joining the 1849 California gold rush, John Edwards Jr. journeyed to Wood County to manage his father’s business of logging and lumber manufacturing. He served as school treasurer and was instrumental in the formation of the first district school.

“If I build a new school building,” he asked Frances, “Will you be its teacher?”

She said yes and the couple founded a dynasty.

The one-room school was located 200 feet west of the riverbank between LaVigne and Washington Avenues. Frances commuted from her father's home up-river until 1861, when she and John Edwards Jr., both 29, were married.

Frances would soon stop teaching in the school but continued her support, looking back later. "I can see them now, the children I taught, as my mind goes back over the many years, and my heart is gladdened to see...not only parents but grandparents."

In March 1891, then a member of the Wisconsin Legislature, John Jr. died suddenly. Herself at the time unwell, Frances rallied to go on and lend support to her many interests well into her later years.

In 1901, when she was 69, Frances published *Leaves from the Almond Tree*, her first book of poetry. In its pages, Frances wrote about family, nature and her Christian faith.

She also composed 176 spiritual songs, which were set to music and published. Unfortunately, these pieces have not been located.

In 1915, when she was 84, Frances took an educational Chautauqua course and in this period traveled extensively through Europe and the Mediterranean.

When she was back in the United States, Frances lived in her home, "Elm Court," in Port Edwards and wintered in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Religion mattered greatly to Frances. She secured Port's second school building to convert into a chapel. The structure was moved to Letendre Avenue, just west of Wisconsin River Drive. Sermons given in the "community church" were Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist.

This church was remodeled in 1917, incorporating stained glass windows, pews and organ from a Milwau-

kee church, all given by Lewis M. Alexander, the son-in-law of Frances.

Frances endowed a Chair of English Literature at Lawrence College, Appleton, Wis., in 1897, the same institution that hosted a chair for Mathematics in honor of our own Emily Witter, mother of Isaac.

Frances Jane Morrill Edwards died Nov. 29, 1921, at a nursing home in Hinsdale, Ill., after having fallen. She was 90.

A century later, students are still learning in the village where she was the first teacher. In place of her "Elm Court" residence, stands the South Wood County Y.M.C.A.

While Port Edwards no longer has one "community church," the United Methodist Church looks over the river where Frances and John started their life together.

This section of a song was written by Frances Edwards and was included in her memorial service:



Alexander House

Frances J. Edwards

*Yes, we are passing swiftly on,
On to the great unknown,
The place, where saints and angels dwell,
Around th' eternal throne;
A land too wonderful for tho't,
For mortal eye too fair,
The Mansions that our blessed Lord
Ascended to prepare.*

*Then dry your tears, all ye who weep
O'er broken links of love;
They are not dead but live anew,
In yon bright world above.
To said "Adieu" on earth succeeds
The "Hail" of friends on high;
Hail and farewell are but one breath,
When loved ones homeward fly.*

OUR GRANDMOTHER.

WHY, grandma was young once, and just like
mamma,

And once she was little as you and I are;
I suppose she prayed Jesus our mamma to keep,
As mamma did us when she rocked us to sleep.

Little Pauline and John were both playing up-
stairs

(I never could count up their half-broken wares);
Their hearts were as whole as hearts ever could
be,—

No broken strings there, that I ever could see.

So the praises of grandma were told o'er and
o'er,

Who could not be pretty or young any more;
Dear hearts! could they know of the long weary
day

That had wrinkled her forehead, and turned her
hair gray;

While from grandmother's shoulders has fallen
the care,

And the burdens are lifted that used to be there,
Then what, may I ask, shall the grandmother
do?

All that she wishes, I'm thinking,—do n't you?

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OUR GRANDMOTHER.

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Instead of the caps that they once used to wear,
Our grandmothers frizzle their silvery hair:
Are they vain? are they proud? I'm sure I do n't
know;
May be they are, and have always been so.

I think they've forgotten the paint and the rouge
By which our young ladies their faces abuse;
Whenever a blush their pale cheeks chance to
wear,

'T is nature's own painting—no false colors there.

Once sitting and rocking in the old easy-chair,
And knitting the stockings for children to wear;
Now weaving the web of her destiny out
By a grander and nobler pattern, no doubt,—

As mingle the tints at the close of the day,
When the soft colors vanish and deepen to gray,
So might the rich shadings of childhood and
youth

Glorify age with their beauty and truth.

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SWCHC

Pauline Alexander and Grandma Frances Edwards

Frances Morrill Edwards

Leaves from the Almond Tree

GOOD MORNING, JOHN.

GOOD MORNING, John, how are you feeling to-day?
 Are you having a good time while I am away?
 Is it cold, does it blow, does it snow, is it wet?
 And how many rides do you manage to get?

Jack Frost bites your fingers, and tingles your
 toes;
 He pinches your cheeks, and he nips at your nose;
 He's saucy as can be, yet he can not stay,—
 You blow in his face, and you send him away.

Are you going to school now, and learning a
 sight
 About how to read, and to spell, and to write?
 You are learning to draw now, to make pigs and
 cats,
 And girls, boys, and women, in bonnets and hats;

To make horses and houses, and donkeys and
 goats;
 To make lots of people a-sailing in boats;
 Big buildings with chimneys, and yards full of
 trees;
 If you wanted to have them, you'd make bugs
 and bees.

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GOOD MORNING, JOHN.

205

Do you like to go out in the snow when it falls,
 And bundle it up into great solid balls?
 And then, if some boy should just get in your
 way,
 Perhaps you might hit him, 't would be just in
 play.

Are you working or playing, within doors or out?
 Be sure and mind always just what you're about;
 And when just like papa you "grow a big man,"
 You must always be good if you can,—and you
 can.

John E. the faithful, and John E. the good,
 Wrote to his grandma when no one else would;
 Now should I scold mamma and Auntie Maud
 too?
 But I guess it's no use now; so John E., adieu.

SWCHC



Lida Edwards Alexander

Lida Edwards Alexander (1867-1945)

Four children were born to Frances Morrill Edwards and John Edwards between 1863-1868. Alice, John and Mary died as infants.

Lida was the only one to survive.

Educated at Lake Forest, Ill., Lida's courses were traditional for a young woman. In one semester, she took instrumental music, vocal culture, piano, languages (Greek, French, German), drawing, painting, elocution and art, showing an appreciation for the arts as her mother did.

In 1885, John, Frances and daughter Lida journeyed to California to relive memories of John's gold mining days, and, in the process, met Lewis Miller Alexander, a banker from Santa Rosa, Cal.

Four years later, Lida's father brought Lewis Miller "L.M." Alexander to Port Edwards for the first time.

In 1890, Lewis and Lida married in St. Louis, Mo. That year, after his election to the state legislature, John invited Alexander to join him in operating John Edwards & Co. Alexander became president in 1891, after his father-in-law's unexpected death.

The Port Edwards sawmill was converted to a pulp and paper company, later joining with the Nekoosa Paper Co. in what would become Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. or NEPCO. Alexander was also president and treasurer of the Centralia Pulp and Water Power Co., the first to build on the Wisconsin River.

Daughter Pauline was born to Lewis and Lida in 1892 and their son, John, in 1894. The family traveled between Port Edwards and Milwaukee, Wis., where Alexander served as president of the Milwaukee National Bank.

After a 1912 boating accident claimed the life of Pauline, the family sold their home in Milwaukee to move back to Port Edwards.

In 1914, Lida's son, John Edwards Alexander, graduated from Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln high school and went on to receive a degree in chemical engineering from the Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago.

In June 1920, the Alexander family supported the construction of the Port Edwards Auditorium as an addition to the school building. Designed by NEPCO engineer E.P. Gleason, and built of brick, steel and concrete, it was the second largest auditorium in the state.

Joining the auditorium to the school building were a vestibule and lobby, which led to a balcony. Seating capacity was 600. There were 4,000 square feet of hardwood flooring available for dancing.

John Alexander was responsible for traveling to Chicago for the stage scenery, equipment, fire-proof asbestos curtains and cameras capable of showing moving pictures.

The first day of the June celebrations included a student pageant, "A Golden Day," followed by the eighth grade graduation.

Port Edwards wouldn't have a high school graduation until the current building was finished in 1932. On the final day of the 1920 celebration, a community dance was held with John as master of ceremonies.

Other notable events held in the auditorium that year were the Carl Rupp Orchestra, dances, harvest shows and a 40-person production of *Carmen*.

John Alexander's father, Lewis Alexander's Aug. 11, 1934, funeral was held in the auditorium, the only location large enough to hold enough people wishing to pay their respects.

Said the *Daily Tribune*, "The body was borne from the hearse, after the private services for the family at the late residence, through a double row of students of the John Edwards high school, dressed in their uniforms of the school band, to the auditorium door.

"The casket was placed in the front center of the auditorium in front of the stage, which was banked with pine boughs. Arrayed clear across the front of the auditorium were the floral offerings, wreaths, blankets and sprays, huge banks of flowers from gardens of neighbors and employees of the mills Mr. Alexander headed."

Lida continued to be involved in the community, through Women's Federation, Daughters of the American Revolution, Study and Recreation Club, Historical and Literary Club, Entre Nous, Woman's Club, Tuesday Club, Sunrise Club, Needlework Guild and the

Health and Recreation committee. She was an original member of Travel Class, begun in 1898 to study art, history, drama and literature of a specific country. Travel Class funded four beds for female patients in the 1916 Riverview Hospital.

Lida was also involved in P.E.O. (Philanthropic Education Organization) which sponsored local girls for loans from the national organization, awarded local



Lida and John Alexander (and figure in doorway) *Alexander House*

college students money and clothing and recognized women at Lincoln high school who aided in the effort.

On Easter Sunday 1945, Lida Edwards Alexander passed away at her Port Edwards home. Fellow club member Harriet Jaspersen offered this tribute: "When she gave you her friendship she was a true friend and had friends from all walks of life. Her reserved nature hid a great shyness. She was modest, feeling that others could 'lead' better than she. I never knew her to gossip or speak ill of anyone. She had a keen sense of humor and could tell a good story when the occasion demanded."

In her will, Lida bequeathed Elm Court as an Edwards-Alexander memorial, available as a public park, health or recreation center, hospital, library or community meeting center. It would become the YMCA.



Lida and Pauline Alexander



American Historical Society

Steel Engraving by Fisher & Co.

Pauline Edwards Alexander

Alexander House

Dorothy Dean Alexander (1898-1981)

Wife of John E. Alexander, Dorothy May Dean was born in July 1898, to Charles (from Maine) and Anna Lillian Dorr Dean (from Whitewater, Wis.) In her early years, her parents separated and she and her mother moved to Chicago. In 1904, Anna married wholesale druggist Oscar F. Isensee.

In an October 1975 interview, Dorothy recalled her first visit to Port Edwards, in 1918. "John said he wouldn't get married unless I consented to live in Port Edwards. We drove up in John's mother's lovely Pierce Arrow Coupe, and outside of changing the tires twice on the way, we got as far as Weyauwega where the engine boiled over and we had to spend about two hours in a hot, old garage..."

"We had to call on the way to find out whether it'd been raining around Wautoma, because if it was raining, we had to go by way of Waupaca, because it was all clay in Wautoma." She recalled that from Plover to Grand Rapids there were no paved roads.

Surely, that is an arduous journey to meet prospective in-laws, but Dorothy said she was in love enough to move anywhere as long as it was with John Edwards Alexander.

Soon she was dancing the nights away at the Moccasin Creek Pavilion, where the couple would bring their own lemonade and sandwiches and afterwards take the streetcar back to Port Edwards.

In June 1919, John and Dorothy were married in Chicago and honeymooned at Colorado Springs, Yellowstone Park and Yosemite Valley. They spent the remainder of the summer in their Waupaca cabin due to the mill strike in Port Edwards. When the couple came back in September, Dorothy remembered, "The pickets used to sit down on the corner where my house is, with a card table and they'd play cards all day."

The Port Edwards auditorium opened Aug. 18, 1920, with John serving as manager. Carl Rupp's ten member orchestra of Chicago was booked, made possible by Dorothy's friendship with Carl's wife, Jane. The orchestra promised they'd provide Orpheum level vaudeville.

The auditorium served as space for clubs and organizations, flower and vegetable shows, student productions and performances put on by the Federation of Women's clubs.

In December 1975, to honor her lifelong love of the theater arts, and for assistance in improvements of new seating, stage equipment, sound and lighting, the "Port

Edwards Auditorium" was officially renamed the "Dorothy Alexander Auditorium" as the 66-member senior choir sang "Fum, Fum, Fum," "One in Royal David's City," "Glory to God in the Highest," "Sing Lullaby," a Basque folk tune and Handel's "For Unto us a Child is Born."

Continuing the support of the previous two generations, Dorothy and John aided the Port Edwards Methodist church. In December 1946, a fire damaged the Methodist church in Port Edwards beyond repair. The dedication of a new building took place in October 1949. Today, a plaque still serves as a reminder of the family's commitment to the church. "The Hammond organ, Carillonic bells, tower music, and the stained glass altar window were given in memory of Lewis Miller Alexander and Lida Edwards Alexander by the Alexander Family."

On the land the family home, "Elm Court," stood, is the 1957 John E. Alexander YMCA.

Port Edwards historian Marshall Buehler stated, "It is only fitting that the YMCA building sits on the land where his grandfather, John Edwards Jr., sat on the porch of his Elm Court home and watched the sawmill develop, and where his father, Lewis Miller Alexander, walked in the shade of the estate listening to the sounds of transition from a sawmill into a paper mill, and where John Alexander played on the lawn as a child."

In 1962, Dorothy began sponsoring an annual Christmas party held at the YMCA, for "deserving children." The event brought in thousands of students over the next two decades. The annual affair consisted of musical performances, homemade ornaments brought to decorate a tree and a distribution of lunch alongside gifts, candy, oranges and apples.

After John Alexander's death in 1963, Dorothy served on the YMCA board of directors until 1979.

She was also a long-time board member for Riverview Hospital. In 1964, when the original white frame hospital was torn down to make room for the new hospital, Mrs. Alexander made numerous contributions for the diagnostic and emergency equipment.

These contributions of Dorothy Alexander earned her the Wisconsin Rapids area Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the year in 1971. Giving the award was Chamber President Jack Gennaro who in his speech depicted the annual Christmas party, "I defy anyone who has attended this party to leave with dry eyes. It is something to behold."

Photos courtesy Alexander House



Dorothy Alexander passed away at Riverview Hospital on Nov. 5, 1981. As the third generation to continue those earlier visions of what a community could be, Dorothy excelled. The family still supports the places their predecessors devoted their energies to.

The Alexander Charitable Foundation provided the gift that made the Riverview UW-Cancer center a reality. It is a major contributor to the John Edwards Alexander South Wood County YMCA located in Port Edwards and for the new YMCA and Boys and Girls club located on the west side of Wisconsin Rapids, formerly the location of Rapids Mall. Their donations continue to aid local culture through the Alexander House Center for Art and History in Port Edwards.

This year marks the Centennial of the auditorium and in December, it will have been forty-five years since its name has been the Dorothy Alexander Auditorium. Through the last decade the Port Edwards School District has been fortunate in receiving the foundation's aid in updating the auditorium's stage curtains, lighting and sound board.

While the Auditorium Centennial Committee has been working with the Port Edwards high school Current Issues classes to hold a weekend of celebration for this summer of 2020, due to the unforeseen COVID-19 we are looking forward to gathering in the summer of 2021.

We hope to see old and young faces, whether you were a student who walked the halls in Port Edwards or have always wondered what was behind those pillars and brick. And though it will be the 101st anniversary, it's still just as good a time to celebrate!

Thank you to J. Marshall Buehler, Port Edwards historian, for sharing memories and collections.

Alison Bruener

**John and Dorothy
Alexander**



Tri-City Airport/Alexander Field



1998



Dorothy Dean Alexander

A Port Centennial Celebration
Postponed

Due to COVID-19 we are looking forward to presenting a celebration next summer in the auditorium's 101st year. We hope to see you there!

Alison Bruener

● “The first time I saw Jennie, she was sitting in the middle of the yard, setting up a wooden washtub. But it kept falling apart. One side would go up and the other side would go down, before she could get it together.”

● “When we visited down there, Jennie would get out special dishes for us girls to have tea parties with.”

● “Mrs. Monson was a midwife. She helped us when the kids was born. There were ten of us, and they’re all living.”

● “She was a real hard worker. Jennie used to tell us her whole life history. I think she had a hard life. I don’t know what they lived on.”

● “Two or three times a day, Jennie was up here nursing my mother, before she died.”

● “I went to the Marshfield fair with my dad and family. We took chicken that Jennie had made. I’ve never tasted chicken that good since. Every time I eat chicken, I think about it.”

● “Once, I fell off my sled on the way down, and she went through six slips and wiped my hand on the seventh.”

● “She was a funny woman. She always worked on Sunday. ‘Why do you do that?’ I’d ask her. She said she just couldn’t find enough time in the rest of the week for all the work that had to be done.”

● “She was a good cook and bare-foot. I often wondered how she got here; she didn’t seem to fit in.”



● “I’m like Jennie. Ten minutes and I’ll have something ready to eat.”

Jennie, center, with Cliff and Josephine Korslin, left, and Jack, Norman, Melvin Monson

Ol’ Lady Monson

By Uncle Dave

When the wife shuffles down the gravel driveway to our mailbox, wearing my ratty “Air Force” parka over bathrobe over pajamas over Canadian husky-musher boots, I call her, “Ol’ Lady Monson”—an archetypal figure of historical and literary presence along what is now Third Avenue, Rudolph township. Grandma, draped in a shapeless cotton dress tied with what looks like a rope, needing to get back to baking bread in the wood-fired kitchen stove and canning up some sauerkraut.

I couldn’t get enough of Ol’ Lady Monson after I bought the “Old Monson Place” in 1976. As soon as I built a house, I began interviewing all the witnesses I could find who had ever crossed that 80-acre rectangle of muck or had encountered its most eponymous occupants.

By Uncle Dave



The Thorson Daughters

Around the turn of the 20th Century, Norwegian and Swedish girls from all over the Midwest convened in the Scandinavian mecca, Minneapolis, Minn. Shown at left are the daughters of Anders and Regina Thorson, who journeyed from the exact piece of Rudolph township land now occupied by Uncle Dave and Aunt Kathy. The rock-walled cellar from the 1880s Thorson house can be found within a thicket of lilacs, honeysuckle and buck-thorn. All those shown at left were successful in finding husbands, also Scandinavian.

Jennie Thorson Monson

Jennie

But she wasn't always an old lady. Her birth name was Regina "Jennie" Thorson ("Regina" with a hard G "Torson"). She was the sixth-born daughter of immigrants Anders and Regina Thorson. Jennie was young, pretty, full of fun and spoke with a sweet Swedish brogue.

In the 1890s, several of the mostly-female Thorson offspring moved to Port Edwards, Wis., to work at the new John Edwards & Co. paper mill. In 1897, Jennie's 16-year-old sister, Ellen, was mentioned in the Rapids newspaper, "learning to be a 'cutter girl'" in the finishing room. Ellen married Peter Quam and continued to live in Port, where she was often visited by her Rudolph family. Jennie's younger brother, Otto, worked in the Port mill as did the husband of Jennie's older sister, Maria—Christ Peterson. Another older sister, Hilma Jacobson (Mrs. Ole), with Jennie and Ellen Thorson, were reported in 1899 to have "returned from Rudolph, where they have been for some time."



By Uncle Dave

Maude Alexander's Traveling Companion

A Jan. 19, 1899, Grand Rapids/Centralia newspaper verifies an improbable connection. "A telegram was received from Healdsburg, Cal., announcing that the mother of L.M. and Miss Maude Alexander was very low with pneumonia.

"Miss Maude departed Monday evening on her long, sad journey homeward, accompanied by Miss Jennie Thorson. L.M. Alexander went with them as far as Chicago."

The ailing mother of Maude and Port Edwards industrialist Lewis Alexander was Almira Alexander, 65. Iowa-native Miss Maude Alexander was about the age of her companion and the subject of our story, Jennie Thorson, born Jan. 18, 1877, in Sweden.

In 1895, the Alexanders built a house in Milwaukee but continued to reside at Port Edwards part of the year.

That year, the mortgage on the Anders Thorson property of Jennie's family in the township of Rudolph had been transferred to the same L.M. Alexander. Most likely, it happened because Jennie went to work for Alexander as a nanny to Pauline Edwards Alexander, born in 1892, and her brother, John Edwards Alexander, 1894.

Story is, Jennie's mother, also named Regina, had been a cook for the Swedish "royal family" making it a natural to go work for our version of royalty.

In 1897, Jennie was documented as being with the Alexanders in their Milwaukee home.

Jennie took over the mortgage on her family farm in 1899.

"Auntie Maud," Jennie's companion, then unmarried, is mentioned by Frances J. Edwards in her poem published in this edition.

Pauline Alexander

Jennie Thorson/Monson told an acquaintance that Pauline Alexander had drowned and that's how she happened to name her daughter Pauline, which makes perfect sense.

I had never heard of Pauline Alexander though from my Two Mile days, I knew who Pauline's dad, John Alexander, was.

In our vernacular, he was a Millionaire when the word meant something. He was landlord of my chipmunk hunting preserve around the then-abandoned airport. He owned the paper mills streaming smoke

over the woods as the big stacks marched up the river behind the tree line. Alexander owned the smell of money that came from Nekoosa.

John was the son of Lewis M. Alexander, another Millionaire. After 1895, the Alexanders made their primary residence in a house they built on Grand Avenue, Milwaukee, as evidenced by a 1909 clipping about a "brilliant social event" here on New Year's Eve—featuring décor by a Milwaukee artist, music from a Milwaukee orchestra and attendance by Mr. and Mrs. L.M. Alexander, Milwaukee. Punch was served by Miss Pauline Alexander of Milwaukee.

Pauline was John's older sister by three years.

Three years later, readers of the July 5, 1912, Grand Rapids Tribune were "greatly shocked." Pauline Alexander, age 19, at Oconomowoc, Wis., with her brother, John, mother Lida, and a friend, "Miss Jones", was boating to Okauchee Lake pier to meet their father, Lewis M. Alexander, who was returning to Milwaukee.

The family were staying at the Sivyver cottage which they had rented for the summer. Pauline was home from May Bennett's prep school in New York state.

Later reports said the engine had stalled and gas leaked into the boat from a flooded carburetor. Attempts to restart the engine set the boat aflame. The likely account is that Pauline gripped the flag pole on the stern, which broke and she fell into the water and, despite being a good swimmer, perished. Brother John was considerably burned. Mrs. Alexander and Miss Jones, having been seated farther from the engine and playing no role in the attempt to avert catastrophe, clung to the vessel until they were rescued.



Sivyver Cottage, Oconomowoc, where the Alexanders summered in 1912

Pauline Alexander, Cream City debutante



“Deceased was well known in this city,” said the *Grand Rapids Tribune*, “having spent a part of nearly every summer at Port Edwards, at which point Mr. Alexander is extensively interested.”

After the death of Pauline, the family left Milwaukee and returned to their old home at Port Edwards, built by Lida’s father, John Edwards Jr., in 1866.

Lewis and Lida also built a home in St. Petersburg, Fla., and wintered there.

L.M. Alexander’s sister, Maud, mentioned earlier as a companion of Jennie Thorson, in 1902 married a Milwaukee associate of L.M. Alexander, Edwin C. Knoernschild and named a daughter, born in 1913, Pauline.

After working for the Alexanders, Jennie Thorson moved to Minneapolis with her sisters, “to meet husbands,” and married Jacob Monson in 1904. In Minneapolis, they had a son, Anders George. In 1916, back at Rudolph, she also named one of her daughters Pauline, the same Pauline I talked to in 1978.

Muck: A Transcendental History

George Monson and Pauline Monson Kolbe were among the first persons I interviewed about the history of the land I had purchased in the town of Rudolph and about which I hoped to write a book.

As of 1978, very little had been published referring to the Thorsons, Monsons or Rudolph township. Even Wisconsin Rapids and Wood County were beneath the notice of most historians.

Aiming to correct that, I soon learned how to employ “boots on the ground” research, traveling among knowledgeable old-timers, historians, genealogists, libraries, historical societies, courthouses, abandoned places and cemeteries. I mailed scores of letters and on a lucky day received information, photos and appointments for interviews, even made some phone calls, a stretch for me.

Working through a Wisconsin Arts Board grant, perhaps leveraged by my board member neighbor, Elaine Schreiber, the project started out with hopes and aspirations. But after a couple years’ research, when I had got a rough draft together, my critics tactfully tried to move me towards something more conventional, like the works of Ben Logan, Aldo Leopold or Justin Isherwood.

As a creative writer, I could not tolerate a lucid narrative. Instead, I found myself writing backwards from imagined futures to a stone age. Beside my narrative dissonance, I found I did not have the ruthlessness of a real writer and was squeamish about revealing personal details about myself or others.

In reviewing the hurtful past, Jennie’s elderly daughter wept, Jennie’s elderly son wept. Another son expressed disgust. Why do you have to dig up the muck?

It was my introduction to history. I didn’t know I would still have shovel in hand well into the 21st Century, thanks to *River City Memoirs* in the *Daily Tribune* and *Artifacts* coming to you from the South Wood County Historical Museum.

Cholera, the COVID of 1835

Anders Thorson (father of Jennie): his grandfather, father, sister and mother all died of cholera in Sweden during a global pandemic of the 1830s.

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**Smokin’
 up
 the
 summer**

1950s

**the portable
 backyard grill,
 a post-WWII
 phenomenon**



**Photo
 by Gib**

Helen Olson, wife of Len, who owned a still standing gas station on 8th St. S., neighbor to Caves, Engels, Murgatroyds, Grauvogls, and that bunch. Looks like Endrizzis’ trees in the back.