

River City Memoirs



Volume II



II

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River City MEMOIRS

**by
Dave Engel**

1983

In the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune

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River City Memoirs, Volume II

transcendental history:
a continuing series in
the Wisconsin Rapids
Daily Tribune

A Wisconsin Tradition

Some of Wisconsin's most interesting people are those who have a curiosity that cannot be satisfied. Curiosity was the greatest trait of our first scientist, humanist and collector, Increase A. Lapham. It was the quality that made him seek truths about Wisconsin.

Lapham first arrived at Milwaukee in 1836, but soon he had traveled over nearly all the land where one could travel in those days. His close observations on the geology, botany, bird life, climate, rivers, lakes and woods were to occupy him the rest of his life. His perspectives seem fresh today.

The spirit of being an interested and recording observer continues as a Wisconsin tradition. Much of the record of the past has been recovered and restored by folklorists, poets, teachers, genealogists, dramatists and journalists. Yet, certain areas, rich in heritage, have been neglected from a state perspective.

Indeed, Wood County has been little mentioned by Milwaukee or Madison writers. Perhaps that is due in part to a relative lack in the past of historical retrospectives produced there. The latest book of general historical material prior to Dave Engel's 1983 *River City Memoirs* was written in 1923.

Nevertheless, the area should be seen as a primary gateway to the great Wisconsin pinery of the mid-1800s. The first sawmill on the Wisconsin River was built in 1831 at Nekoosa. The first pulp mill on the Wisconsin followed in 1884, a predecessor to some of the first paper mills in the state.

Now, the entire "River City" is most fortunate in having on the scene a writer who is moved by curiosity to chronicle the whole spirit of the past, of human achievement, survival and folly. The appearance of Dave Engel

Robert E. Gard

seems fitting as that of Lapham, years ago. Born in Wisconsin Rapids' Riverview Hospital in 1945, Engel attended local schools, worked in city mills and surrounding farmland. After high school, he left, but returned to write and live.

The Wisconsin River has become famed as the "hardest working river in the world." Rightly, Engel portrays it as central to immigration, industry, thought and history. While handling factually a variety of sources, from first-hand testimony to mud-caked long lost letters, documents pasted to stair steps, newspapers bundled in attics and 150 year old maps, Engel is able to write emotionally and personally a lively tale.

In a sense, such writers, through energy and dedication, save places rich in history and tradition from oblivion. To Engel, it is all important.

The great get their share of attention. One has only to read about

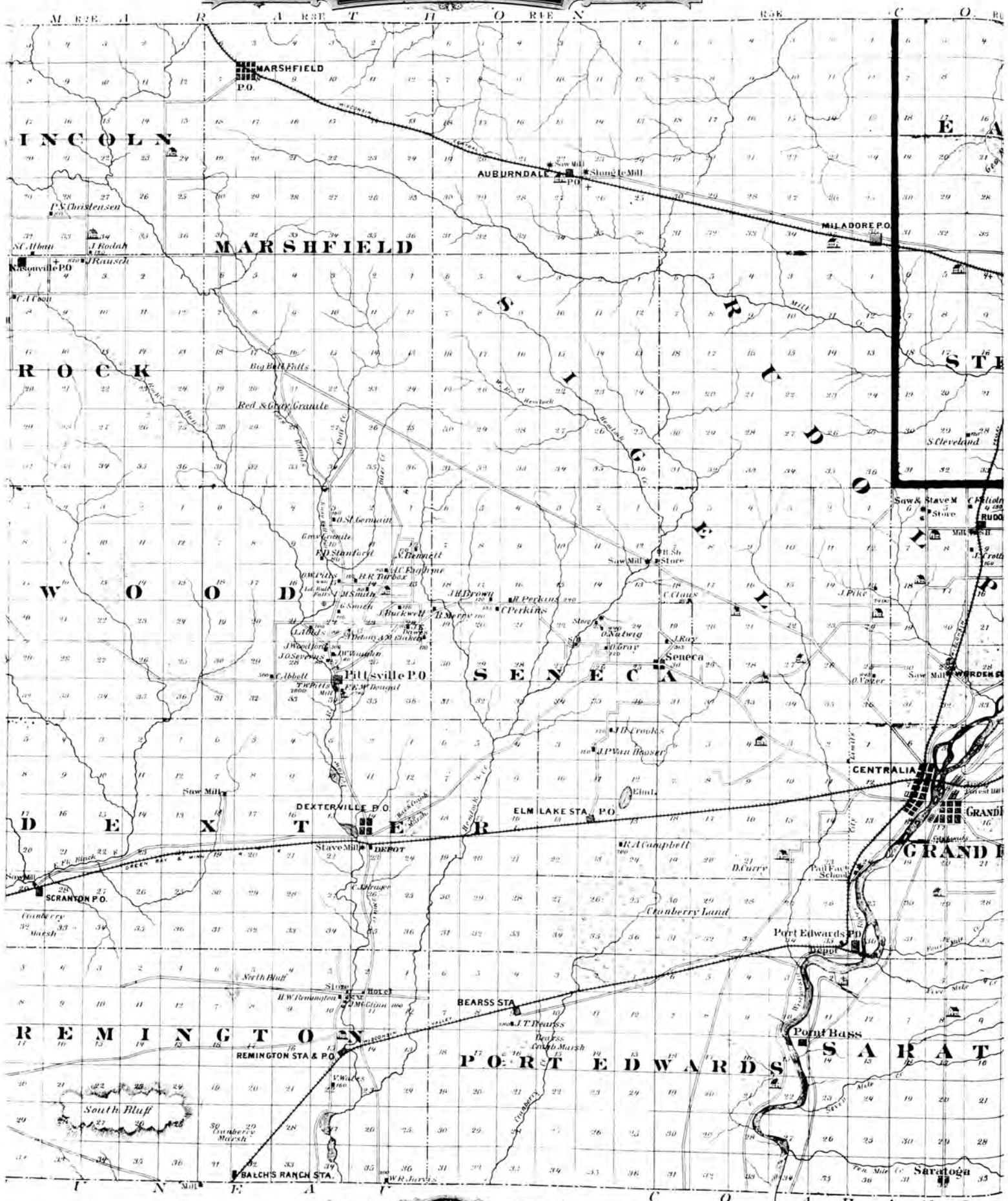
"King George" Hiles, lumberman and railroader, to be instantly drawn into history and legend. Hiles in his time dominated Dexterville, Amelia, Cary, New Dam, Turner Creek, Catherine, Progress and Lindsay. He left an immense forty foot tall monument in the Dexterville cemetery, though the rest has vanished mysteriously: all those towns, his fortune and his forest. Except for the curious historian, so would go the stories of Hiles' exploits.

To Engel, the less legendary demand equal space. The dreams of a nursing home resident who once was amazed to hear his wife's voice from the Chicago world's fair over the radio, the reminiscences of a harness maker who actually saw King George Hiles walk down a Pittsville street and anecdotes of Engel's own life all emerge as integral to the "memoirs" of River City.

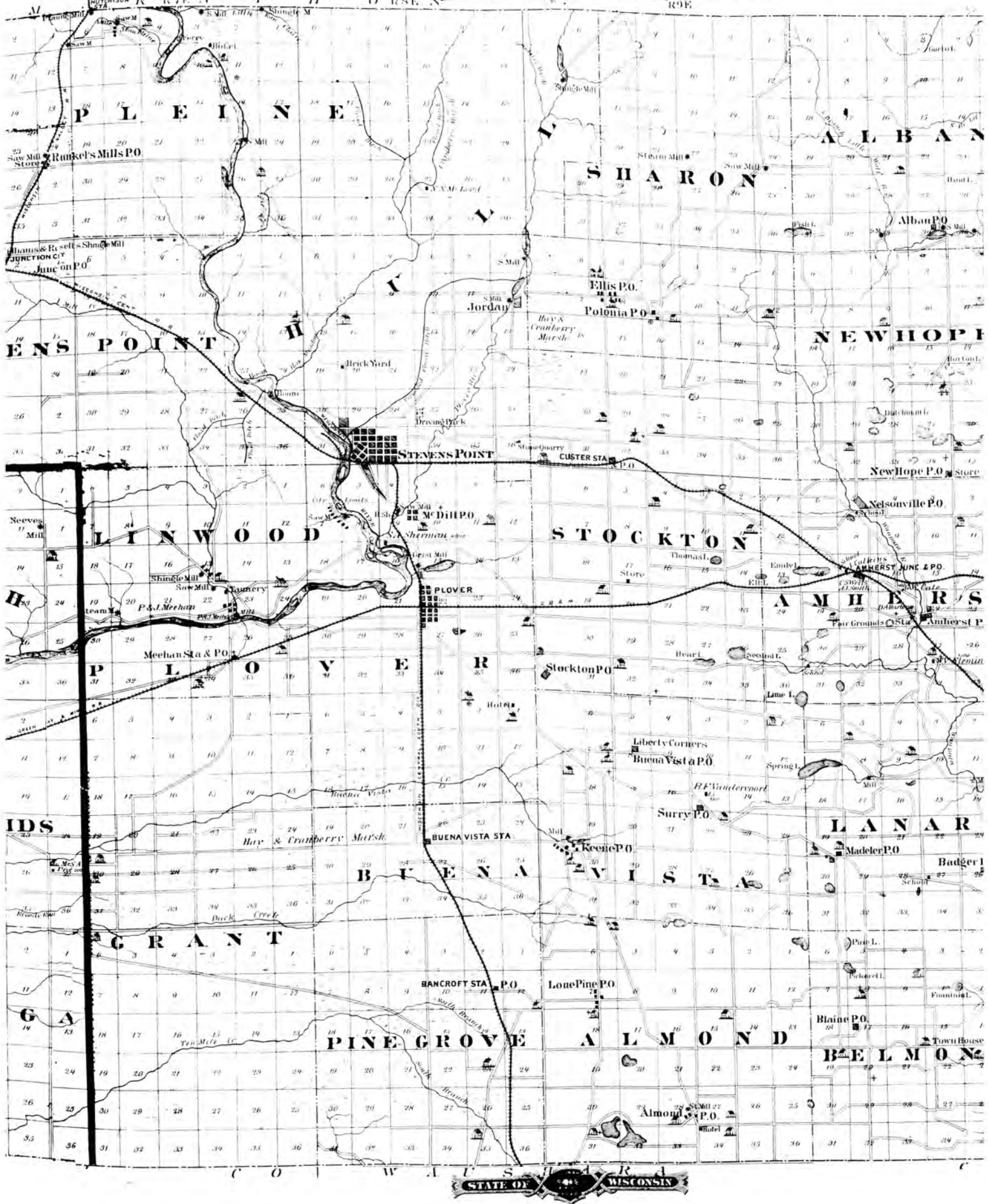


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MAP OF WOOD COUNTY



MAP OF PORTAGE COUNTY





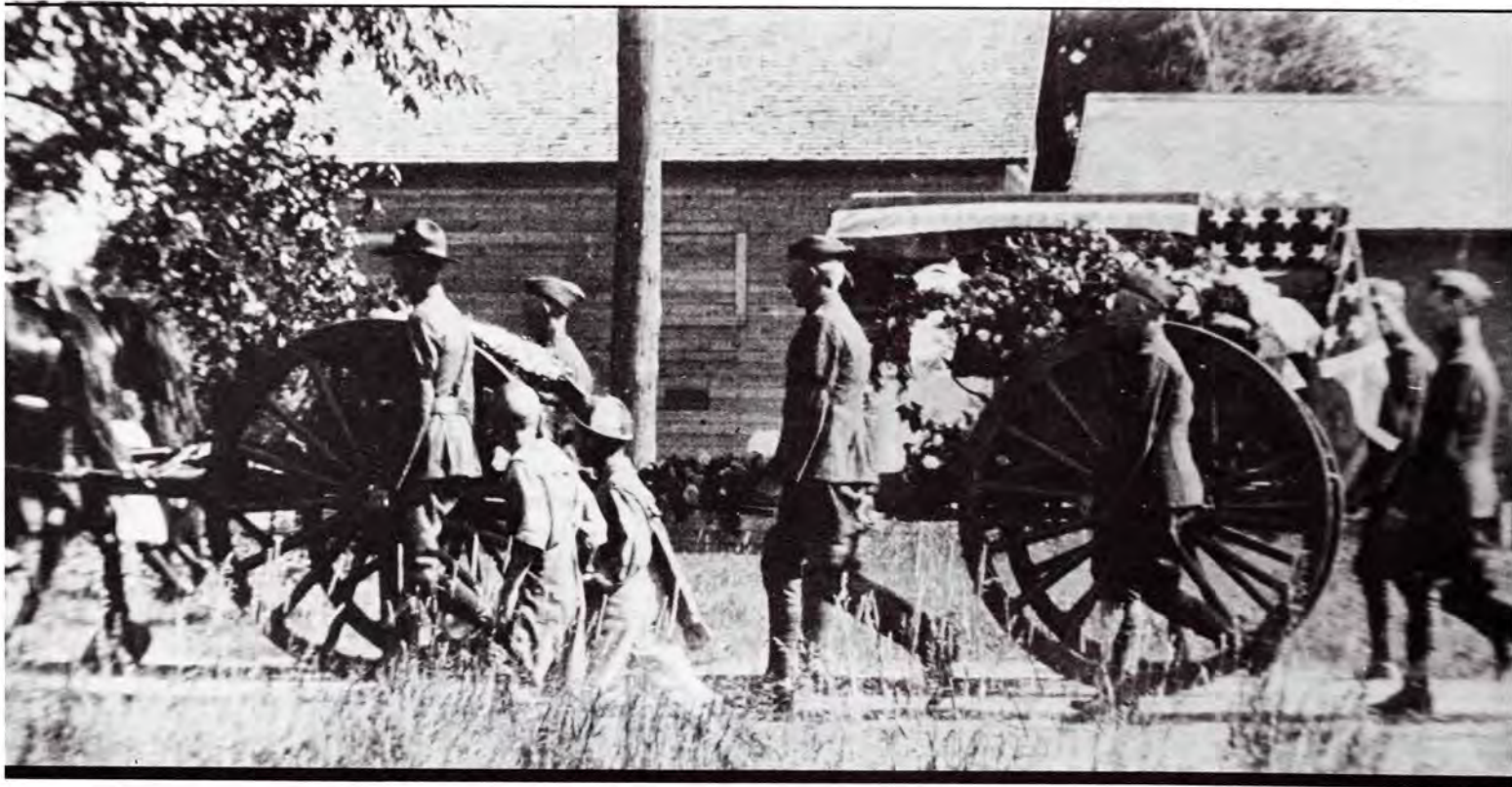
Servant of Humanity

Deeply regret to inform you that it is officially reported that Private Charles Robert Hagerstrom, Field Artillery, died August 9th from wounds received in action.

Though his deeds scarcely acquired an heroic dimension, Charles Hagerstrom would not soon be forgotten. The first soldier from his town to die in the great war, Hagerstrom lent his name posthumously to the new American Legion post. And four years after Private Hagerstrom's 1918 death, Legion post commander Richard Gibson arranged to have him brought home.



Mrs. Ernest Hagerstrom



The Hagerstrom story isn't very long.

Late in 1917, Charles Hagerstrom, born 1898, enlisted with Battery B, 120th Field Artillery of the 57th Brigade and reported for service at Milwaukee.

On March 4, 1918, Hagerstrom sailed from New Jersey for Europe.

In May 1918, Hagerstrom entered the combat zone after training at LeHavre, France. His first battle was on June 10 as his battery moved into a position facing the enemy in the defense of the Elcaise sector.

Hagerstrom's second battle was the offensive at the village of St. Gilles on Aug. 4, 1918.

Three days later, he was wounded in action. On Aug. 17, 1918, Charles Robert Hagerstrom died in a base hospital behind St. Gilles.

On April 30, 1920, the local American Legion post asked for the return to this city of the body of Charles Hagerstrom. Two years later, that request was carried out and the remains representing Wisconsin Rapids' first World War I hero came home.

In honor of the ritual, Mayor O.R. Roenius pro-

claimed a moratorium on business and banking from 2 to 4 p.m. on June 21, 1922, the day of the burial ceremony.

The body lay in state at the Armory on the East Side, near the present Jackson Street Bridge. A military guard watched over the casket.

Eight former members of the 120th Field Artillery who served with Hagerstrom in France acted as pallbearers. Every former serviceman was entitled to march, in uniform, in the procession from the Armory to Forest Hill Cemetery. Their beat was the melancholy requiem.

On the day of the services, the Armory was crowded. To onlookers, it seemed the whole city took part. The Daily Leader estimated that 2,000 witnessed the event there.

The Rev. C. Madsen of the Scandinavian Moravian Church, to which Hagerstrom belonged, opened with an invocation. An anthem by the choir of the Moravian church followed. Charles Hagerstrom had sung with that group. While in France, he had conducted Bible classes for his fellow patriots, the Leader said.

The funeral oration was delivered by the Rev. A.A. Bennett of the Wisconsin Rapids Methodist church. He said Hagerstrom was like the humble laborer whom the people of Biblical times had rewarded for his service to God and country by burial among the kings.

Hagerstrom, said Bennett, had earned our grateful remembrance not for the high places he had filled but for his deeds of love and service. "The man over whom we say these unworthy words was a private in the ranks, serving at the command of another."

Bennett continued, "We number our heroes not by the amount of wealth they had gathered. Multitudes are living as if their wealth were the only thing that is worth while, the only thing that will keep them in everlasting grateful remembrance.

"During the world war where our heroes fell, life's blood was spilt to drown the fire of hell which greed and lust had started. There were all too many who found excuses to stay at home that they might profit by the sacrifices of others. Will

the war profiteers be buried among the kings, think you?"

The Methodist ecclesiastic concluded: "Would you keep your name from oblivion, then do something for God and humanity? Peter was a good tentmaker. Jesus was a good carpenter. But they were more. They were the servants of humanity.

"As these men served—as the great of the earth have served—so our hero served."

At the conclusion of the necessarily symbolic eulogy, the casket was placed upon an artillery caisson waiting outside the Armory and the march to the cemetery was formed. Along the way, the roads were lined with automobiles and onlookers.

At the gravesite gathered what was called the largest crowd ever to meet at Forest Hill, to hear a prayer by the Rev. J.H. Schoechert of the Scandinavian Moravian Church, followed by the American Legion burial ritual. The casket was lowered. A firing squad paid the final honors. The last sound was "Taps."



Soldier Citizen

When the 6th Regiment of the 2nd Division of U.S. Marines interposed themselves between the Germans and Paris, at a place called Belleau Wood, Pete Bymers' company hit deadly fire and was pinned. Finding himself sequestered indefinitely behind a large rock, Bymers battled an opposing machine-gun nest. "When one of them would stick his head up," he said, "I'd pick him off."

In the bitter struggle, Bymers killed six Germans. All but eleven of his company died. For his own efforts, Bymers was awarded a personal citation for distinguished and exceptional gallantry.



Pete Bymers, Cheesemaker and Soldier

Although Bymers was born at La Crosse (1896), he has been a Wood County resident for 86 years. When the Benson and Anderton Land Co. of Sherry advertised cutover land, Bymers' Dutch immigrant parents bought a wild 80 in the township of Arpin.

While the land was being cleared by his father and two older brothers, Bymers had to stay in the house and help his mother. That is, when he was not attending the local one-room school. For a boy with a zest for the outdoors, "this was not too encouraging," he said.

As he grew older, Bymers joined in the hard farm work. But there was time for baseball, running races and marbles. Later, he enjoyed Saturday night dances in a neighborhood granary or barn. Not so much fun were Sunday morning Bible classes.

Adventures in the big city of Grand Rapids, 15 miles to the southeast, came rarely. With a team hitched to a lumber wagon, the trip took all day and was made only in spring and fall.

About 1907, a cheese factory was built nearby. Dairy farming could be developed only if the farmers had an outlet for their milk. In 1913, Bymers' parents sold their farm and Pete was encouraged to become a cheesemaker. He dutifully joined his brother in the trade but soon found the business, like Sunday school, rather confining. He wanted to be out in the weather.

After another short hitch working at a railroad station, Bymers left on the first train he could catch for the 1916 Dakota grain harvest. It was while sowing wheat in April of 1917 that Bymers heard war had been declared. He went home, enlisted in the Marine Corps and was shipped to France in October.

At the cessation of hostilities, Bymers was one of the Marines chosen to participate in the victory parade through Paris on July 4, 1918.

Before he could go stateside, though, Bymers

was hospitalized with a leg ailment and had to be operated on. When he finally reached New York, Bymers still had not been paid. He had to wire the Vesper bank for money to get home.

After the war, Bymers started farming so he could continue the outdoor life. On Dec. 14, 1920, he married Rena Hoekstra from Sherry. About the time World War II came around, Bymers sold his farm and moved to Wisconsin Rapids. He followed the carpentry profession from 1947 until his retirement.

Because of his age and experience, Bymers can remember what the rest of us cannot: wolves in the wilderness west of his Arpin home; farmers in the township working off their poll tax building roads with graders pulled by as many as six teams; Indian boys come down from Skunk Hill to join a game of baseball; brick and tile being manufactured in Vesper by the Murgatroyd brothers; the attempt to establish a button factory.

From his visits to the "city," he can recall the street-car line to Nekoosa and Strangler Lewis wrestling Pittsburg's Johnson at the Rapids Armory.

Bymers saw a succession of three bridges cross the Wisconsin River. As a kid in knee pants, he marveled at a steel beam bridge that could sustain circus elephants only one at a time and that required marching bands to break cadence lest it collapse. As a young man, he watched a new concrete structure arise from below the water level, our Grand Avenue Bridge. As a carpenter, Bymers joined the construction of the Jackson Street Bridge.

Like other local men, Bymers had been called from a pastoral America to a foreign land. His duty was to defend by attack; his mission meant he had to kill. When he came home, Bymers, with those who had survived their heroic venture, lived to marry, to farm and to build.

Johnny One-Oh-One

John E. Wilson, ol' pick 'em up Johnny one-oh-one, the best man in town and you had to whip him to prove it. That was "Grandpa" to Otis Wilson. He said he was going to live to be a hundred and he darn near made it.

When Otis, 73, was a youngster, old Johnny one-oh-one regaled him with yarns from the Civil War, which Johnny had entered at the age of 15.

Johnny's most vivid stories took place at Spotylvania Court House, an 1864 battleground. He spoke of Gen. Grant riding on a white horse up and down the regiment. "Men, we been here 11 days. We got a hole through the breastwork only two men can walk through but we're going to take it on. Anyone who doesn't dies at the point of a bayonet."

Old 15-year-old John E. Wilson sat making his meal of hardtack, salt pork and chicory coffee. When he heard the orders, he said, "Johnny's ready."

"When Grant give 'em the order to charge," said Otis, "they riz and fired their single-shot muskets and ducked. The cannons fired over them." After the one shot per gun had been fired, the fighting became hand-to-hand.

"Gen. Grant was riding a pure white stallion and that horse would paw men left and right," said Wilson. "Grant whipped out his sword and cut off a man's head. Instead of white, the horse became red."

One "monsterin" big rebel stood at the breastworks, said Wilson. Johnny one-oh-one watched him pick off seven men with his bayonet until it came his turn to step up. Then Grant hollered that the reb was too big and somebody ought to take Johnny's place but instead Johnny, who had learned from watching, caught the reb's eye and started to pitch the way he knew he was expected to but instead swung his musket and knocked the reb's bayonet off. He stabbed him and pushed him to one side.

"Blood run off that breastwork," said Otis, "as if you'd taken pails of it and dumped it."

Grant accepted Lee's surrender in 1865 at Appomattox Court House, where Grant, said Wilson, set up his little white table under an apple tree. "Grandpa had a root of that tree. They took it apart for souvenirs."

Ol' John E. pick 'em up had a brother named Wright. "I must have got my character from

him," said Otis. "He was a devil, raising hell all the time."

It seems Wright was lying in a breastwork when he felt the need to taunt the rebels opposite by baring his hind parts and raising them above the wall. For his patriotic efforts, he was rewarded with a minie ball in the cheek. Shortly thereafter, Wright was captured because he couldn't move fast enough any more.

Wright was placed in Libby prison, a "four-square" trench so bad the lice were crawling on the ground. Wright survived only by answering to the name of a dead man and taking the extra food.

One morning, said Otis, John E. Wilson, the best man in town, sat making another cup of chicory coffee when a guy stopped and said, "Johnny, don't you know me anymore?" It was his brother, Wright, who had been exchanged for a rebel prisoner.

Otis' grandfather Bill used to walk the old stagecoach road from Plainfield to Grand Rapids to pick up the mail. In October, said Otis, he was carrying a double-barreled shotgun when he stopped for a rest and fell asleep under an oak tree. He woke up under a pile of leaves to the sound of something burying him. Bill didn't move until the sound went away.

Then he jumped up, grabbed the double-barrel, dragged a stump to the oak tree and climbed. "Here come the old panther with two cubs," said Otis. "The panther climbed on the stump and looked up. He gave her both barrels."

Otis' father, Arthur E. Wilson Sr., could throw Strangler Lewis and could box. "If a guy wanted to give him a whipping, he'd look him in the eye and say, 'Mister, don't hurt yourself.' Then it was all over," said Otis. "The old southpaw'd come up and the other fella'd be asleep."

Art showed up at his son's wedding in 1928 wearing faded overalls, said Otis. When he gave the minister \$10, the minister refunded \$5, the service was so poor. Though he and his wife, Carrie, have been married 55 years, Otis contends the minister later jumped off a balcony and committed suicide, on account of his lackluster performance at the nuptials.



Otis Wilson

A Democratic Wagon

"I got hit right in the face with a snowball! I had got them in the bus one by one and held the door so they couldn't get out when one husky girl got me square in the face. I went after her and shook her. 'Oh Mr. School Bus Driver, I'm so sorry,' she said."

That happened at Madison after the state basketball tournament of 1951, as buses and cars loaded up in a heavy, wet snow for the ride back to Wisconsin Rapids. Their team had just won the championship. "When we headed out," said Wilson, "it sounded like a load of popcorn with snowballs and what-all hitting us."

Wilson's transit experience started back in 1930. He hitched spotted Arabian horses to a "Democratic wagon" with a spring seat and built a "coop" on the back, in which he placed seats and a stove made from a five-gallon can. His riders were taken to an Adams County school.

Wilson progressed to an automobile, a station wagon and a 1941 Chevrolet bus. When he sold out his Silver Line in 1955, Wilson owned five school buses and seven dump trucks. "You get bigger and bigger," he said, "as business prospers."

Mail-order Matrimony

It was not too many years after Clarence Reichel's father died that Clarence overheard his grandmother making the fateful announcement. "His name's Henry Pagel from Rapids," she said.

Either Pagel, a Rudolph farmer, or Reichel's mother, the Milwaukee widow, had placed a notice in a newspaper advertising his or her availability for matrimony. The opportunity was seized by both parties.

When Reichel and his mother got off the train at Wisconsin Rapids, Pagel waited with a two-seated topless buggy. In honor of the occasion, said Reichel, "the horses had been all shined up."

"It was May time," he said. "I'll never forget the flowers. And the trees were in blossom."

Reichel's mother died in the 1917 influenza epidemic. She left not only her 11-year-old son, but a boy and a girl who had been adopted.

"Henry asked me what we should do," said Reichel. "We had to send them back to the orphan home."

Not long after that, Reichel himself was orphaned again.

Pagel, he said, had started a gravel pit by the river, in the side of a hill. Over the winter, it had been dug into, leaving an overhang of three or four feet.

"It was starting to thaw up a little bit.

Farmers were all building barns at that time and they needed gravel."

"That morning," he said, "I made breakfast and we ate. Just before he left to walk down to the gravel pit, Henry Pagel says, 'kid, when you get back from taking that half-full can of milk to the cheese factory, the team will be harnessed up.'"

"When I got down to the pit, Bill Zimmerman and August Karth had their sleighs almost full. I shoveled some snow onto the road for them.

"Henry went up with a sledgehammer, pounding all along the overhang so the stuff would break. I looked up. The farmers were busy shoveling their sleighs. I was going to say 'look out' but it cracked and he was falling already. He hollered bloody murder.

"Then he was half buried and it killed him right there."

Reichel stayed around for a while, helping local farmers. For entertainment, he often accompanied other young Rudolphians to Molepske's dance hall, a flask on his hip or in his pocket filled with moonshine made by "that Mill Creek gang."

"Some of it was in pop bottles," he said. "A fellow'd get too much and through the window it'd go."

The Saratoga Fire

"I never knew if my place was going to be standing," said Rose Klafka of her home at Mill Road and 90th Street. The big fire had already destroyed her daughter's two-story farmhouse.

One of the worst fires in memory, the Saratoga conflagration burned 6,159 acres and a half-dozen houses, although Mrs. Klafka's was saved. Like many historical subjects, the specifics were difficult to pin down—such as when it happened.

Many guessed the year as '78, '79, or even '80. A well-placed source said it was known as the "Mother's Day fire" and occurred in late May.

Unlike most historical subjects, the Saratoga fire, however misplaced, swept through the jack-pine subdivisions within the

memory of elementary school children on April 27, 1977.

Mrs. Klafka, born 1911, moved to the Kellner area with her second husband, Tony, after their 1962 marriage in Milwaukee. "I married my first husband's cousin," she said. "He knew me when I was married to John Knapinski. My husbands' mothers were twin sisters. It was all in the family."

"When my husband retired, we moved to Rapids," she said, "because we thought it was such a nice place. He had a sister living there so we had been going years and years to Rapids."

Mr. and Mrs. Klafka retired to the veterans home when he required nursing care.

"I still love Rapids," she said. "There are so many new things now. I love to go and see it."

King

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King was founded in 1887 by the Grand Army of the Republic to provide for the needs of aging veterans of the Civil War. Now a state-operated facility for disabled veterans of all wars and for their wives, widows and mothers, King is the residence of the seven former citizens of River City, who speak here.

Bulge Busters

Lawrence Steinke, born 1924, is a youngster by King standards, although he has fought in two wars.

In World War II, Steinke was sent to England, Holland, Belgium and France. He finally wound up in Germany. It was the Battle of the Bulge at the end of 1944 that proved his undoing.

"It was dark, Christmas morning," Steinke said, "The Germans had two captured Sherman tanks ahead of six Tiger tanks. They got right in among us. I got the tank commander with a grenade but a machine gun from the tank's belly got me through the nose."

After a short recuperation, Steinke went back to the war in France and Holland.

"They called our 75th Division the bulge busters," he said.

After a variety of jobs in the Wisconsin Rapids area, Steinke enlisted again. This time he was sent to Japan. Later, he spent 10 months in the Korean conflict.

"With all the mountains and rice paddies and so few roads," he said, "it was a foot soldier's battle. We couldn't use tanks like we did in World War II. We went down that country one way and then the other."

Odd Jobs

For much of his childhood, Henry Zimmerman (born 1918) lived on the Rudolph township farm owned by his father, Alex. "I didn't do too much there," Henry admitted.

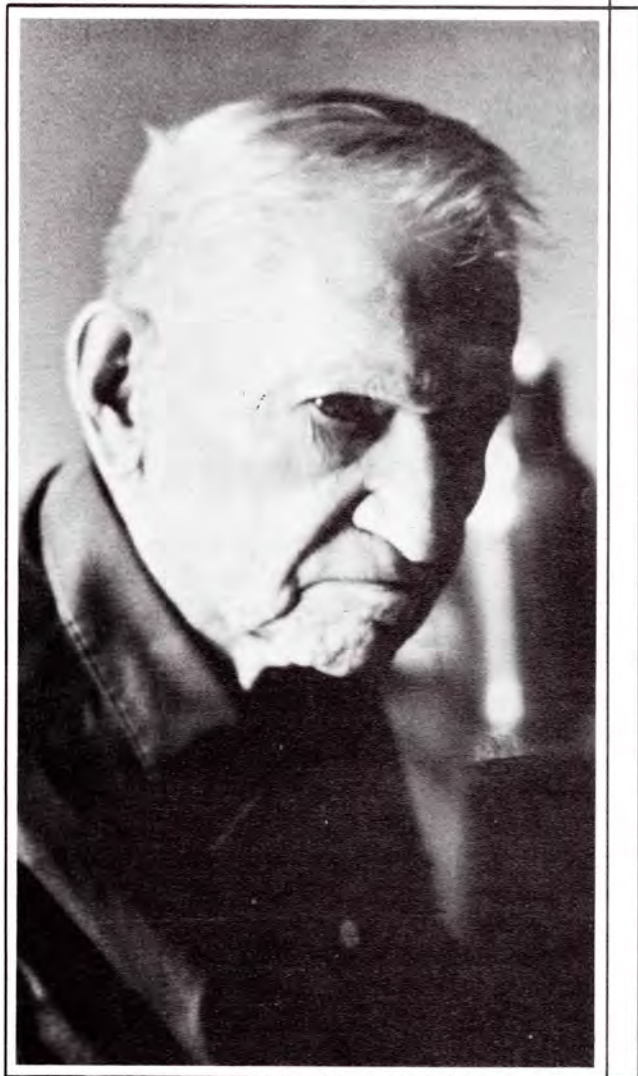
The family moved to Wisconsin Rapids after Alex "got a job in the mill." Henry attended Irving school "for a while" but soon gave up formal education in favor of "odd jobs."

One such pursuit was doing the laundry for the Dixon Hotel, a position that led to a more expansive program. "They got me in the Army," he said.

Zimmerman's tour of duty was in Burma and China during World War II. "I was in the medics. I worked in a hospital. It was rough." His barracks were often bombed, Zimmerman said.

In 1945, Zimmerman mustered out and came back home. "I took it easy for a while," he said. Then he went to work for Rapids Beverage and, later, NEPCO at Port Edwards. "I don't know why I ever quit. You know how it is when you're young."

His punishment for leaving the mill was 34 years stripping down cars at Morris Wolcott's wrecking yard on Highway 13 South.



So What?

"Most of it was timberwood or brush," said Walter Moscicki, born 1890, of his childhood home in Sigel. "It was all farming, farming. The only difference was one farmer tried to make more money than the next."

In Sigel, there were barn dances and home dances. Moscicki played the mouth organ. "All those young people, no place to go out there in the country, until later years when they built a dance hall at Rudolph."

Moscicki was drafted into World War I, "but so what?" he said. "Everybody else got drafted. Me and my two brothers, Ted and Ed, went at the same time. I was in New Jersey on the docks, loading and unloading boats."

After the war, Moscicki bought a farm and got married but his wife took sick and he had to sell out. He moved to Port Edwards and worked there at the paper mill for 35 years. "I got kicked out in 1958," he said.

"Farming, struggling, hard work," said Moscicki of his life, "but so what? What are you going to do about it?"

Traveling Salesman

When Louise LaBlond crossed the “big water” from Copenhagen, Denmark, to this country, she was 18 and the year was 1900. Mrs. LaBlond, a widow of a Spanish American War veteran, celebrated her 100th birthday on Jan. 12, 1982.

“I had an aunt that lived in North Dakota and a cousin north of Marshfield,” she said. “Between the two, they coaxed me over here.”

At the American shores, Mrs. LaBlond (then Louise Hansen) had her money changed and took a train for Marshfield. She arrived there at 3 a.m. “That was quite an adventure to travel in those days,” she said. “I enjoyed the trip immensely. I met lots of nice people. Those are things you don’t forget.”

Louise met Phillip LaBlond, a traveling salesman, at a party in Wisconsin Rapids. “He liked the town,” she said, “because it had four railroads: the Green Bay, the Northwestern, the Soo Line and the St. Paul.

“Time went on,” she said. “I guess we just took a notion to get married.”

In Wisconsin Rapids, the LaBlonds lived on Hale Street until they moved to King in 1939.

“Mr. LaBlond was a salesman. He had come here to see the colonel. The colonel said to him, ‘Phil, why don’t you come down here when you retire? It’s a nice place. You’ll like it.’” The Colonel added, “Ask your wife.”

Though Mrs. LaBlond has lived in the veterans home for 44 years, she remembers fondly many Rapids landmarks.

Daly’s Opera House: “Heavenly day! That was a great big, old building. They had movies, parties, dances.”

The Armory: “They used to have parties and dances. Then the roller skates came in. It was an amusement place.”

Market Square: “Farmers used to come with their produce.”

Arpin’s Hill: “You could go in winter and skate.” Also on the East Side: John Barnes’ Candy Kitchen, Muir Shoes, Steinberg’s, Daly’s Drug Store, Steib’s Drug Store, Arndt’s Restaurant, Klun Studio, Herschleb’s Bakery, Beardsley Grocery, the Witter Hotel.

“It was a nice town,” said Mrs. LaBlond. “When you go there now, you can hardly find your way. They surely had a lot of fun tearing that town up.”





All My Six Boys

Mable Casper was 44 years old when the United States entered World War II in 1941. Her husband, John, was a World War I veteran.

The two had come with their family to Wisconsin Rapids during the war because John got a job at Consolidated.

It was like everywhere else," she said. "Everybody was looking out for their own, crying for their children.

"All my six boys went in one year," she said. "It makes you feel heartbroken."

Two sons were injured, but all six came home alive.

"They were good to me," she said. "They're good to me now. All my boys are coming to see me Mother's Day."

While in Rapids, Mrs. Casper's family lived on 10th Avenue North and attended St. Lawrence Catholic Church. "I loved it in the Rapids," she said. "And I love the Polish people. We never missed a fish fry."

First Undertaking

David Baker once owned Centralia, at least, as his obituary phrased it, "nearly all that part of the now city extending from the river back to near the depot, and quite a way up, and down the river."

Baker was born in New York state in 1812, the year his father, Solomon, of English descent, fought against the English in the war of 1812. The family moved to Centralia, where David bought 57 acres, much of it swamp, in 1843.

With David came his wife, Elizabeth, two daughters, his wife's mother, Elizabeth Kline, and other members of the Kline family, who had originated in Strassburg, Germany.

Kline

Members of the Kline clan had already come to central Wisconsin. The first was George Kline Sr., who had served Napoleon as a bridge builder. Upon Napoleon's defeat, Kline had gone first to Quebec, then to New York and then Wisconsin, where he joined Daniel and David Whitney.

After working with David Whitney in 1836 at Whitney Rapids, near Nekoosa, Kline moved to Centralia, where he built the first mill there in 1839 or 1840. His son, George Kline Jr., arrived at Grand Rapids in about 1838 and worked for Strong and Bloomer at their sawmill. His marriage to David Whitney's widow, Maria, was the first in town.

The younger Kline, however, joined the 1849 gold rush to California and never returned, "probably meeting the fate of so many who made that dangerous journey," according to his biography in the *History of Wood County*.

George Kline Sr. met his death in 1853, while working on the Merrill dam and was brought down the river in a canoe to be buried here.

Baker

George W. Baker, son of David and Elizabeth, was born in 1843 in the log cabin his father had built on the banks of the Wisconsin, near the present Daily Tribune building. The first white child born in Centralia or Grand Rapids would call this city home for all his 70 years.

"Very few men live in one town for three generations," wrote the Grand Rapids Tribune in Baker's obituary, "and the things that he could

tell of the early days in this community would make an interesting volume. In the days that Mr. Baker first remembered Grand Rapids, the town was then but a hamlet on the banks of the river, a stopping place for lumbermen and raftsmen. They stopped a while, drank and fought, and went their way.

"Mr. Baker saw the hamlet disappear and give way to the village where some form of government was necessary," continued the Tribune. "Then this was superseded by the city, which has grown in his time to be a flourishing commonwealth whose people have got past the mere questions of making a living."

When Baker neared the age of 18, the Civil War began and he became one of the first local enlistees, joining in August 1861 Company G of the 12th Wisconsin Infantry.

His service brought Baker to the siege of Vicksburg, along with other Wisconsin volunteers, such as the Lodi Badgers and, said the Wood County Reporter, to "all the engagements between the surrender of Vicksburg to Atlanta where he took part in the fierce two days battle, where the 12th Wisconsin Regiment fought on both sides of the Rebel breastworks."

From Atlanta, Baker marched with Sherman in a special detail of mounted infantry known as Sherman's Bummers. It was their duty, said the *History of Wood County*, "to forage on the country for supplies." The Bummers got their name "from their free and easy manners and nondescript appearance as they returned to camp loaded with hams, bacon, chickens and other welcome produce they had lifted from the yards, barns and smokehouses of Southern mansions.

"Mr. Baker so thoroughly entered into the spirit of these raids, as well as into the more serious duties of a soldier that his comrades used to say 'he never missed a fight or a meal whenever there was anything of that kind in sight,' " recorded the *History*.

Unscathed by his apparent exuberance, Baker took in the Grand Review in Washington at the end of the war, in which the victorious armies gathered. After that, he returned home for good.

His father, David, who spent his life in the timber and shingle business and farming, as well as in public service, died on Feb. 3, 1880, of consumption. He was a man, said the Tribune, "without an enemy in the world."

The funeral was at the Baker residence. The remains were followed to the grave by a large number of friends, very many from "abroad," said the Tribune.

Mother Elizabeth Kline Baker's funeral was in 1898 in the "old Baker homestead," on Baker Street, "in which she lived to see her mother, two children and husband carried out from its door to be laid in the narrow tomb."

In a style typical of the time, the Enterprise and Tribune added, "We can say 'It is well with her.' She has joined the many loved ones on the other shore, but another home is broken and hearts are desolate."

The *History of Wood County* adds this perspective on the lives of David and Elizabeth Baker: "They were worthy people whose lot was cast for the most part in the formative period of our country's history, and whose experiences, regarded now by their descendents in the light of romance, were doubtless viewed by themselves as very matter of fact as well as hard and trying."

Warren

When George W. Baker returned from the Civil War, it didn't take him long to marry Elizabeth, the sister of another veteran, Clarence Shepard Warren.

Both Baker and Warren were born in 1843. Both enlisted in their country's service and continued until the war was over. Both fought at Vicksburg, with Co. G of the 12th Wisconsin Infantry.

Warren's birthplace was Steuben County, New York. He, along with Elizabeth, and his mother, came to Grand Rapids sometime between 1856 and 1860 to join Clarence's father, Marcus C. Warren.

Marcus Warren is likely our city's first funeral director, or "undertaker," as the profession was then known. According to a newspaper clipping, Warren established a mortuary business in 1852. One of his major duties was to build coffins.

Warren, with the help of his son, Clarence, conducted the East Side business until 1888, when it was sold to the man who was by now son-in-law, George W. Baker.

Besides tending to the "Warren Furniture & Undertaking Business," the elder Warren also served for seven years as assessor, two years as county clerk and as deputy county clerk for eight years.



W.L. Ratelle

George W. Baker

For a while, George and Elizabeth Warren Baker farmed in the town of Rudolph, until Baker became the first superintendent of the county poor farm. He held that position until 1888, when he bought the M.C. Warren furniture and undertaking business from his father-in-law, an enterprise he conducted until 1903. At that time, he intended to retire.

Clarence Warren, who, as stated, had served with Baker in the Civil War, fell from a scaffold in 1891 and was killed.

George W. Baker

George Baker was known as a prominent and public-spirited citizen. He served as mayor, alderman and poor commissioner of Wood County.

After some years of comparative leisure, Baker, in order to start his son, George W. Baker Jr., in the mortuary business, organized the firm of Geo. W. Baker & Son, in 1907, re-establishing the old concern.

The Wood County Reporter of Oct. 9, 1913, sounded the alarm of George W. Baker's own mortality.

"Geo. W. Baker, Sr., we are pleased to note is a little easier today, and those waiting upon him believe there are signs of improvement. His many friends hope that he will rally from this stroke."

Baker never regained consciousness. He died Oct. 9. The Tribune reported that he had suffered a stroke a number of years previous, but had "so entirely recovered from this that nothing was thought of the matter."

"Altho not a politician in any sense of the word, Mr. Baker was at one time mayor of the city, and has held other offices of trust, and he was never found wanting by his friends," eulog-

ized the Tribune. "For many years past he has been engaged in the furniture business and has established a reputation for honesty and square dealing that was a valuable asset to him."

"Though he was not a member of any church organization," wrote the Reporter, "his creed and rule, 'To do good is my religion,' was always followed."

Mary Jane Warren

Besides George Baker Sr. and Clarence Warren, another Grand Rapids/Centralia citizen born in 1843 was Clarence Warren's wife, Mary Jane, whom he married in 1866, the same year George Baker married Elizabeth Warren.

Born in Black Hawk, Iowa, Mary Jane Searls, a relative of the Klines, moved with her parents to Centralia in 1846. Her obituary on Dec. 17, 1913, the year of George Baker's death, said, "It would indeed be interesting if one could look back and see the changes that have occurred in our little city in the lifetime of this woman."

"When the family came here from Iowa the trip was made with an ox team, and in those days there were many places where the roads were well nigh impassable even for this slow method of locomotion."

"The family settled on the Centralia side of the river, and there was little there in the way of human habitation, while the east side was a mere stopping place for raftsmen who tied up here for a few hours to rest after the arduous work of getting their rafts over the rapids. In those days even a well constructed log house was considered a luxury and many times the settlers were without the bare necessities of life."

Kline, Baker, Warren: among those families who lived the first chapter of the river city romance.

Greater Grand Rapids

"Hustling, prosperous, busy, up to the minute. This in brief describes Grand Rapids, Wisconsin, and if the writer should go no further into detail, the above sentence would be sufficient to the average wide-awake citizen," wrote A. Decker, in the 1907 book, *Along the Wisconsin River*.

"The eastern traveller who is out for pleasure, and the more observing traveller, the home-seeker, are just now paying their respect to Wood County. And from whatever side the region is entered the passage is through a field of activities. New towns are rising, old ones are expanding, every day adds some new trade or business to meet the multiplying needs of the community."

"This book was written to tell the achievements of a people who in little more than half a century have wrought out of a wilderness a progressive, productive little city." Decker said he wanted to promote commercial and manufacturing interests, to work for the development of natural resources and to improve the condition of the working class.

Although his pitch was primarily material, Decker paused to philosophize. "Money is means, but civilized life is the end—and civilized life means something more than three meals a day, a suit of clothes, and a bunk to sleep in. While the people of Grand Rapids, pending the early development of their city, and its more recent phenomenal growth were quite absorbed in laying the foundation of material success and providing the means for the more attractive side of life, they have now reached the point where they can spare some of their characteristic energy and abundant resources to improve their everyday surroundings."

One selling point for the Rapids, according to Decker, was that not all the good buildings were in a bunch, a situation that would defy the laws of proportion.

"The poor quarters of Grand Rapids are offset by the fact that the residence portion of the city in which the people take a just amount of pride and satisfaction are not all in one portion of the city, and the humbler dwellings are overlooked by the casual observer as he glances at the more pretentious buildings, which are scattered in almost all portions of the City."

Decker attributed the overall success of the

Rapids community to the railroads. He said 24 passenger trains arrived and departed daily and that a freight aggregate of 20,000 cars was shipped out of the town of 7,000.

Hospitable to industry and commerce, Grand Rapids "is one of the best cities in the state for the laboring man. Its mills, factories, lumber companies, and many of the other leading manufacturing industries run the year round, and part of the year day and night, to keep up with their orders, and the man who is looking for honest work can here find what he wants."

A good home life, cheap living expenses, educational advantages, good water, climate, churches, lodges and amusements such as picnics along the river all made Grand Rapids a good place for the laborer who wished to better himself and his family. However, he advised the man who wanted only a week or two of work to just pass on by; he wasn't wanted.

Decker momentarily reflected on the river city's past. "Out of the north came the message of infinite space; into the north rode the youth of conquering freedom . . . The English trader paddled his boat on every stream, and drove his dog team over every trail along the Wisconsin River to bring out furs and peltries, while the American emigrant hauled in with his rude wagon the nineteenth century progress."

He saw 1907, his "present," as a time of parting for the saw-mill and the paper mill, "twin brothers." "One is looking forward and the other backwards," Decker said.

As for the lifting the "veil" of the future, Decker remained enthusiastic.

"If during her early history Grand Rapids has surprised her own people, surely a bright future awaits them. The people are rapidly accumulating wealth, and as fast as capital is gained it is re-invested in real estate or some other enterprise. New industries are sure to come, and this means new labor to be employed, and the result is, more families and in general more business for Grand Rapids.

"In other words it simply means a 'Greater Grand Rapids.' "

Feel secure, Decker said, that Wood County "is too big to be owned, too undeveloped to be syndicated, too young to be exhausted."

GREATER GRAND RAPIDS ILLUSTRATED



W. S. POWELL,
Register of Deeds.



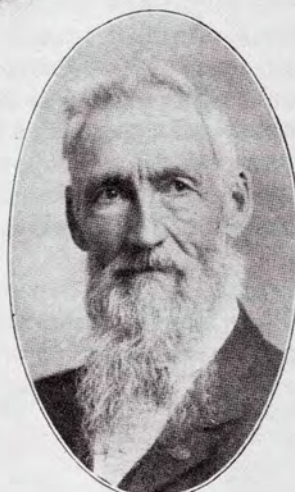
BERT BEVER,
Clerk of the Court.



Court House.



G. W. DAVIS,
County Clerk.



P. F. BEAN,
County Treasurer.

Lem, the Kromer

They call him Lem the Kromer. Little Lemuel Kromer, who came to Grand Rapids in 1845 because he was so small.

Along with some friends, he had left LaGrange, Ind. to assist at a barn raising nearby. As young men must, Kromer and friends tried to talk one another into heading west. On the way home, six agreed to leave the following Monday.

By Monday, three had backed out, leaving "Douglas, Henry Mason and myself," to start for St. Joseph, Mich., wrote Kromer.

At St. Jo, Mason decided he had gone far enough. That left two to take the trip across Lake Michigan on a boat to Chicago.

After a few days job hunting in Chicago, Douglas found work. Kromer did not and moved farther west, to Galena, Ill. via stage. There, he was told he was too small for work in the mines. He tried to hire on as a teamster, hod carrier, "or anything," but was still too small.

When Kromer arrived in Mineral Point the next day, the refrain was the same, "too small," to work in the mines.

He continued north to a saloon where a man pitching quoits asked him where he was going. Could he cook? He would try, up in the man's "pinery."

They embarked for the north country on a wagon loaded with two barrels of pork, one barrel of whiskey, some flour and groceries.

At Grand Rapids, Kromer's benefactor, Mr. Bell, a teamster for Sampson and Strong, introduced him to Mrs. Sampson who in turn took him to the kitchen and presented Mrs. Strong. They were, she said, the only white women in town.

Grand Rapids consisted of a sawmill, a boarding shanty and a tavern kept by Sampson and Strong, all surrounded by tall pines and hemlocks. The inhabitants, said Kromer, were mostly French and Indians.

The Indians were apt to get "ugly," so much so that Mrs. Sampson "saw fit at one time to throw one of them through the dining room window

into the street."

Kromer engaged for the winter as cook to A.B. Gilchrist and S. McCarthy in a shingle shanty on Mill Creek. In spring, he returned to Mrs. Sampson's. "Men commenced coming out of the woods and we were soon overflowing with them feeding as many as 100 at each meal. It was considered a poor day when not more than four or five fights were had. I have known of not less than twenty in one day."

Only rarely, said Kromer, were weapons used and no grudge was held by the vanquished. "All hands were called up to drink and woe be to him who refused."

"Thus matters went on in this style for three or four years," wrote Kromer. "Rafting lumber, running the same to market, was the business of those days. A little later other businesses branched out."

"About this time Ben Buck made his appearance on the scene and was a terror to the community. His exploits consisting in whipping almost everybody, turning over dinner tables, throwing stones through windows.

"On one occasion I saw him completely cowed down by Thomas Law. At another time he came in contact with Fred Case who gave him to understand that if he ever interfered with him he would cut him through, at the same time exhibiting a weapon something in the shape of a bowie knife."

Another time, the honorable T.B. Scott "brought forth to view a revolver and politely informed him what to expect if he ever attempted an assault."

Kromer himself became a merchant, but in later years took a position as agent for the Adams Express Co. When Wood County was formed in 1856, he signed on as clerk of circuit court and registrar of deeds.

Ben Buck likewise achieved respectability in the new government . . . as its first sheriff.

Roy

And Martha, wife of Charles Louis Passineau, begot Raymond, Roy, Walter, George, Clarence, Joseph, Mae, Mildred, Mabel, Isabelle, Ruby, Bernice, Kathryn, Lauretta, Dorothy, Norbart and others.

Roy Passineau is a true son of River city and cousin to a crowd of its inhabitants. His grandparents were all pioneers here and his family was multitudinous.

On Roy's mother's side is the Irish line: Daly and Mathews. On his father's side are the French: Pinsonneau and Akey.

Roy's mother, Martha, was a Daly, born June 2, 1884. She married Roy's father, Charles Passineau, on Nov. 28, 1906. Martha's 21 pregnancies resulted in 15 children who lived to maturity.

Akey

Soon after the birth of their first child at St. Calixte, Quebec, Joseph and Delima Josslyn Ethier Akey, in 1853, moved to Dodge County and then to Milwaukee. There, Akey managed a farm for Silas Juneau, the brother of Solomon Juneau—considered by many to be the founder of Milwaukee.

In 1865, the Akeys settled in the town of Rudolph, in a log shanty owned by Mrs. Akey's brother, "Bat" Ethier. Upon their arrival in Grand Rapids, the Akeys had the privilege, according to family history, of being the first to cross the first bridge across the river to Centralia.

Crossing the bridge was easier than getting to Rudolph. That journey took three hours.

The Akeys bought land and built a log house. He died in 1881. She died in 1909. They had seven children: Theophile, Oliver, Peter, Eugene, John, Rosella and Mary Rose, who married John Baptiste Pinsonneau.

Pinsonneau

A young man from Canada, where he was born circa 1820, Joseph Pinsonneau rode the log rafts down the Wisconsin to St. Louis. It was the occupation of his generation.

At St. Louis, he met Sophia Larmie, also of French-Canadian parentage. They married in 1842 and moved up to Frenchtown. Now it's Port Edwards. The Pinsonneaus owned most of it then.

At Frenchtown, Pinsonneau built a sawmill and began making wooden shingles. Later, he put up another shingle mill in Centralia, south of what is now the Grand Avenue bridge.

Pinsonneau continued to travel to St. Louis with shipments of lumber and other timber commodities. In 1864, he left his family and went up to Wausau for a fleet of rafts to take to St. Louis.

From this trip, Pinsonneau did not return. He is considered to have been murdered near Stevens Point. His body was not found.

One of the five children of Joseph and Sophia was John Baptiste, born Sept. 9, 1853, in a logging shanty belonging to the lumberman George Neeves, on what is now 1st Avenue South.

John Baptiste, in many capacities, influenced the evolution of Grand Rapids/Centralia.

One task was clearing the land that later became downtown Wisconsin Rapids. For a number of years J.B. operated a flat-boat ferry across the Wisconsin River. He worked for the city, helping install the first sanitary sewers and a water system—made from hollowed logs—along Grand Avenue. He served as a police officer for several years and, for nine years, as a volunteer fireman. He helped build the road bed, it has been written, for every railroad in Wood County.

Like his father, he worked in the woods logging and, in spring, went down to St. Louis with the lumber. The worst part of the entire drive, he said, was the "grand rapids."

Pinsonneau said that, like the other river rats, he never cut his beard or hair during the winter. Come spring, they tied the rafts up at night and slept on the river bank. One time, he said, it sleeted and froze, and the next morning, he had to cut his hair and beard loose with a knife.

On Dec. 25, 1875, John B. married Mary Rose Akey. Before her death in 1891, they had six children: Josephine, John B., Joseph, Mary, Orabell and Charles, Roy's father.

John remarried and had six more children.

Matthews

Louis Mathews' father, Martha Daly's grandfather, was Michael Mathews, born in 1819 in Ireland, who came to New York as a young man. His future bride, Anna Broderick, was born in 1827 in Ireland and came to New York in 1839. They were married in 1845.

Shortly afterward, Michael and Anna Mathews migrated by wagon train to Southport, Wis., now Kenosha.

In 1853 or 1854, the couple traveled by ox team to the township of Saratoga, where they farmed for many years and raised eight children while operating as well a "halfway house" for those pilgrims who journeyed by way of the trail that is now Highway 13.

Besides the halfway house, which would have been a tavern, inn or the equivalent of our motels, Mike Mathews Jr. operated a dance hall on the farm.

The old Mathews house on the corner of Griffith Avenue and Highway 13 still exists, although it has been divided into two houses and moved from its original location south of "Smokey Joe's Corner." The larger section stands south of the Sportsman's Bar. The smaller is on Griffith Avenue, just behind that tavern.

These chunks of an old building stand as reminders of an historic passage, from Ireland to America, from Adams-Friendship to Grand Rapids/Centralia and from there to some place called "here."

Daly

Martha Daly's father was Charles Daly, born 1849 at Smethport, Penn.

Charles Daly's father, Eugene, was born in Ireland in 1818 and came to Smethport as a young man. There he met Martha McDowell, born 1822, of Scotch-Irish parentage. They married about 1840.

It was after Eugene's death that Martha came to Grand Rapids, where she died in 1908 of "summer diarrhea." Of 15 Daly children, four are known to have moved to Grand Rapids.

Charles came to the area around 1865. He married Louise Mathews in 1883. His profession was meat merchant and winter logger. "Anybody who dealt with Charley Daly felt that they had nothing to fear," said his obituary in 1915.

Charles and Louise at one time owned a large part of "Sand hill." Their farm occupied the area now bounded by 8th Street, Pepper Avenue, Lincoln Street and Daly Avenue. They also owned 35 acres southwest of Pepper Avenue and Lincoln Street.

Charles and Louise had five children. Martha, Roy's mother, was born in 1884.

Martha married Charles Passineau on Nov. 28, 1906, at S.S. Peter and Paul Catholic Church.



Roy Passineau

Passineau

Somewhere along the line, the French "Pinsonneau" got changed to "Passineau."

Charles Passineau, the youngest child of J.B. and Mary Rose, was born on June 19, 1884. When he died on April 13, 1964, he had six sons, nine daughters, 55 grandchildren and 51 great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by four children and 12 brothers and sisters.

Charles married Martha Isabelle Daly in 1906. For many years they farmed in the town of Rudolph on land once owned by Grandpa Daly. Charles worked at the Biron Division of Consolidated Papers Inc., to which he could walk. He quit just short of retirement to run a hotel at Bagley, Wis.

Charles and Martha moved back to Wisconsin Rapids, where they lived in the same house Passineau's grandfather built in 1853.

Roy John is their second-oldest child, born in 1908.

At the age of 16, Roy went to work for Consolidated. In 1926, he took up flying and, in 1928, went into the Air Force. He returned to Wisconsin Rapids, where he operated Roy's News Stand on 1st Street South.

In 1932, Roy opened a restaurant on Oak Street. Then he moved to Sparta, where he worked on the construction of Camp McCoy. He also worked on the army base on Guam.

In 1948, Roy bought a farm near Cataract, Wis., and continued to work in the construction trade. Later, he worked at a La Crosse foundry until cancer caused the loss of his right leg.

Since his return to Wisconsin Rapids in 1969, Roy has become a well-known truck farmer and vegetable vendor at his Lincoln Street outdoor market.

If you too have roots here in River City, there is a good chance that when you stop by to squeeze the squash at Roy's, you can greet him not with an anonymous "How're you," but with a familial "Hello, Cousin!"

St. Jean Baptiste

A century ago, June 24 was a day of pageantry and patriotism. Unlike our 4th of July, the pomp was not directed toward what were then 38 United States of America but toward Canada and thither to France.

According to the *History of Northern Wisconsin*, "the St. Jean Baptiste Societie or St. John the Baptist Society here had been organized in 1856 with about 70 charter members. Membership was restricted to those who spoke French.

The first officers, however, weren't elected until 20 years later.

The first president was Henry Belanger, who was quoted in a 1970 history of S.S. Peter and Paul Church here. "The society was organized in 1875 when my father and brother, George, who is now a priest, were visiting in Grand Rapids. We had a gathering of French Canadians, and the idea struck us that a society of some kind should be organized in order to bring the few Canadians in this city together at least once a year.

"We perfected an organization and, on the 24th day of June, 1876, we had the first celebration. It was such a success that one was held annually for a number of years."

The 'brothers' assembled at an early hour, forming a procession in front of Arpin's Hall at 9 a.m. and proceeding to the Catholic Church, where religious ceremonies were conducted with much pomp and ceremony.

"The marshals and lieutenants mounted upon richly caparisoned horses, added to the dignity of the procession.

"The rear of the procession was allotted to the Patron Saint of the society, represented by a little son of Mr. G.A. Corriveau robed in a finely prepared lambskin." The boy held a white lamb by means of a blue ribbon.

Leaving the church, the society moved to "Music Hall." A feast was enjoyed before marching over to "the grove" by the new Centralia School, where addresses were delivered and dancing indulged in. Another "social hop" at Music Hall wound up the exercises of the day.

The society also met for at least one winter activity as indicated by the Jan. 4, 1882, Reporter.

"The St. John the Baptist society assembled at their hall New Year's evening and with their families, enjoyed a picnic supper and dance. The fun lasted until the following morning at 5 o'clock."

The celebration the following summer, said the Reporter, "excelled any former one that has been our pleasure to witness. As advertised they met at their hall, formed in procession in full parade dress, about 80 strong, and headed by Odd Fellow Cornet Band marched to the Catholic church, where special ceremonies were held."

The parish priest, Rev. Beyerle, addressed the society in French, complimenting them for their devotion to benevolence and charity. Then the procession moved to the Commercial Hotel for "a bountiful dinner." In the evening, Garrison's Hall crowded to capacity as dancing continued to the "wee small hours of the morning."

The Centralia Enterprise and Tribune of June 25, 1887, presented another portrait of the society's annual "St. John's Day."

"Today, the turnout is still finer than on former occasions and the sun shines clear and bright, the members of the society . . . in full regalia, with banners flying to the breeze and keeping step to the music of the Centralia brass band. The little St. John the Baptist, personified by Master Willie Boucher with the emblematic lamb, drawn in a wagon shaded by maple bowers and ornamented with flowers is an attractive feature of the march."

As usual, the picnic was held at the Centralia School grounds in the pleasant grove of trees. "White dresses, multi-colored ribbons, fresh bonnets overshadowing rosy faces, made lovelier by the soft shades of the leaves made the scene pleasanter still."

The grand ball that night at the Opera Hall was expected to be attended by "the dancing public" as well as society members.



Grand Rapids Catholic Church, 1882

The writer praised his French-Canadian friends for the prosperous condition of their society. "They have a large surplus in the treasury to meet all emergencies, and not one single person of their nationality has had to apply for assistance since the organization of that mutual benevolent association." A year previous, it had been reported that the group had \$1,225 in the bank.

The final notation of the June 24 ritual came in the June 29, 1889, *Enterprise* and *Tribune*. This, advertised posters, would be the 15th anniversary of the Grand Rapids St. John the Baptist Society.

The procession formed with members in full uniform, banners flying and in pursuit of a brass band through the "principal streets" of Grand Rapids and Centralia on their way to another generous banquet at the school house grounds. "The ice cream was dished out in abundance."

The grand dance at the opera hall "was well attended and was also conducted in a very orderly and decorous manner, so that the dancers spent a very pleasant night, tripping the light fantastic toe until the 'wee sma' hours of the morn."

In closing, the 1889 story stated: "Take it all in all the celebration was really a success, although some regretted that there should have been no divine service at the church on the occasion."

There was no divine service apparently because the priest, Rev. Beyerle, who had previously spoken in favor of the group, had "for reasons of his own," withdrawn his support and "allowed" the St. Jean Baptiste Societie to disband. Like the Good Templars and the Knights of the Maccabees, a colorful brotherhood flourished in the 19th century and finally folded its banner for good.

King George

When he lived, they called him King George. When he died, they buried him as if he had been one.

King George, who had founded a string of towns across his central Wisconsin empire. Who left an estate of \$3 million largely composed of Wood and Clark county timber, 70,000 acres of it. Who farmed 12,000 acres with the most modern machinery.

King George, who ruled Dexterville, Scranton, Amelia, Cary, Lynn, New Dam, Turner Creek, Catherine, Progress and Lindsay and who wanted Babcock and Pittsville.

Who in Milwaukee owned choice residences including his own home at 88 Farwell Ave. and a row of flats at Cambridge and Forest Home avenues.

Whose Chicago holdings amounted to half a million dollars—his 240 acres in Chicago Heights, his tract in Chicago Lawn and Franklin Park, his houses downtown.

Who "with his large means, his recognized ability as a man of affairs, and his comprehensive grasp of financial problems," was at the time of his death one of the largest owners of timbered land in Wisconsin and owner of 100,000 acres of pine land in Florida and a 5,000 acre ranch in Nebraska.

That most majestic of historical subjects, George Hiles of Dexterville, emerged from a humble origin, a log cabin in the northwoods.

The year before his death in March of 1896, a biography of Hiles appeared as a chapter in the *History of Milwaukee County, Vol. III*. Much of the information contained therein probably came from Hiles himself.

"One of the most successful men among the pioneers of Wisconsin and one who may be said to have grown up with the state is George Hiles, now a citizen of Milwaukee, where he has become prominently identified with banking interests, and well known as an extensive lumber manufacturer and property owner."

According to the account, Hiles was born at Farmington, Mich., Oct. 23, 1828, son of John Hiles and Phoebe Mansfield Hiles, who had come from New York state with the earliest immigrants to Michigan territory.

Farmington was a frontier, much like Wood County, Wis., would be 30 years later. In fact, George Hiles is considered to be the first white child born there.

The Hiles place was, like most northwoods homesteads, a tangle of stumps and brush. George, as a lad, helped his father clear the land and became "far more familiar with toil than with schools or other educational institutions." What academics he picked up came at his mother's elbow.

When she died and his father remarried, new tensions arose in the household. At the age of 18, George took off for the next territory.

Before he left, however, he visited with his sweetheart, Miss Amanda Brown. They reached the conclusion that separation would be unbearable and were married. Traveling by wagon, the couple drove around southern Lake Michigan, through Chicago and finally to Baraboo, when that settlement was more a trading post than a town.

"A young man of broad common sense, honest, industrious, and energetic, although he had no other capital," Hiles went into business.

The principal industry at Baraboo was a sawmill, where Hiles found employment at a rate of \$14 per month. The winter following his arrival, he worked in a lumber camp, where "his industry and honesty soon won for him the high regard of his employer."

Among those with whom he became acquainted was a trader named Wood, "who evidently looked upon him as a sagacious and thrifty young man" because he took Hiles as a partner in the Indian trade business.

Hiles traveled the pinery, meeting with Indian fur trappers and trading whatever baubles, gimcracks or tools he had for their animal skins. Often, he went to Milwaukee to sell the pelts.

After two or three years, Hiles had accumulated enough of a stake to open his own store in Baraboo, which he ran for several years. Through whatever means, the business prospered and the Hiles fortune began to accumulate.

"Naturally a close observer, and an excellent judge of the value of lands and land products, his travel and experience as a trader gave him a knowledge of a broad expanse of Wisconsin territory, which proved exceedingly valuable," recorded the *History of Milwaukee*.

Among the places visited by George Hiles, fur trader, was "Eagle Point," where, "observing the splendid timber of this region, he was quick to perceive that in the not very distant future it must become immensely valuable and the manufacture of lumber one of the great industries of the northwest."

His friendly relations with the native Winnebagos apparently helped Hiles in his search for good timber and choice sections of land. As soon as it was open to settlement, Hiles "was on the ground promptly," acquiring large tracts not only for himself, but as agent for others.

About 1852, Hiles moved to "Eagle Point" and founded the seat of his prospective empire. Said to be named after Hiles' mule, the new kingdom was called Dexterville.

In company with Albert Searles, Hiles built the first saw mill in the region, a water-driven mill "of the old-fashioned kind," and very small compared to those he would construct later.

From 1853 until 1888, Hiles lived at Dexterville. In the region, he built 15 saw mills. The last, still operating in 1895, was considered one of the finest lumber mills in the state.

For some time, there was no rail transportation, so the entire product of lumber, staves and shingles had to be marketed by way of the Yellow, Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers. Hiles solved the problem by building his own railroad in 1883, from Dexterville Junction (Babcock) 50 miles north to the town of Lynn in Clark County. He sold out in the early 1890s to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Co.

Chicago had become the principal market for Hiles' timber products. He had an office there and a distributing agency, along with extensive real estate and other properties. In 1886, he decided to move to Chicago and take his considerable fortune with him. Hiles was 58 and ready for semi-retirement.

He changed his mind and moved to 88 Farwell St., Milwaukee, another city in which he had many interests. One of his projects was the rehabilitation of the Marine Bank, which had failed during the panic of 1893.



During his reign, King George became known as a somewhat cantankerous despot.

Circuit Judge Gilbert Parks said on a number of occasions that it was his solemn opinion that his court was not legally in session, since, in looking over the docket, he had noticed that the name of George Hiles was not mentioned, either as defendant or as plaintiff, in any of the suits of law pending.

Pittsville's experience with the monarch is a case in point.

Hiles had planned to link Pittsville with Superior by train until the complaints of local housewives that his newly built charcoal kilns might mess up their wash caused the city to pass an ordinance forbidding the operation of those kilns. King George refused to allow his railroads to go to Pittsville at all. He said he hoped grass would grow in their streets.

Instead, grass grows in the streets of Dexterville and all over Hiles' kingdom.

Once weighing more than 200 pounds and a robust sort of man, Hiles in his last several years declined in health to "a mere shadow of his former self." Yet, he attended to business almost every day.

The last summer before his death, Hiles had been in Dexterville, which by that time had grown to around 500 people. He was especially interested in the reclamation of marsh land and the conversion to dairy farms.

In October, he moved to his Milwaukee residence because a more equable temperature could be maintained there and because better attention could be provided.

That winter, King George suffered a series of paralyzing strokes. Then on March 8, 1896, a Sunday afternoon, he partly arose from the lounge on which he lay, gasped and fell back dead.

He had already planned his memorial. The entire program of burial was carried out in accordance with wishes expressed by Hiles before his death. He requested that his last resting place be in a cemetery just over the river from the town he had ostensibly named for his mule.

At Dexterville, all was quiet. The mills had shut down. The stores and shops closed. "Every line of activity seemed to have ceased in harmonious intuition with the last heart beat of the founder of that little berg and the

support of it for lo! these many years," observed Wood County Reporter.

A special train from Milwaukee had reached town at 8 a.m. with the body of King George accompanied by Milwaukee and Chicago relatives, except for Hiles' invalid wife. The "corpse" was taken directly from the coach to the schoolhouse, where services would be held at 3 p.m. At the school, the body rested in a bed of flowers.

About noon an eastbound passenger train on the Green Bay line steamed into Dexterville. It carried a special car filled with those paying tribute to the old railroad magnate.

The delegation was met at the depot by Samuel Hiles, the brother of the deceased. Carriages waited to take them to the services.

At 2 p.m., a third special train arrived. This time the passengers were railroad dignitaries who had come to pay last respects to a colleague.

"In the little Dexterville schoolhouse with its rough, undecorated walls, far away from the wealth and finery and busy hum which must, in life have surrounded the millionaire lumberman," wrote the Reporter, "occurred the last solemn rites." A choir from Grand Rapids sang.

The railroad built a special spur to the cemetery to install the \$10,000 monument that marks the burial place of Hiles. Shaped of Vermont granite, the piece was brought in on flat cars. In the process, the tip cracked and had to be reshaped.

George Braun, longtime Dexter town chairman, was quoted in 1956 as saying he learned that Hiles had provided in his will for the five-acre cemetery with explicit orders that it be used freely by his friends and relatives, but that it not be administered as a public cemetery. To insure his wishes, the will provided \$25,000 for upkeep of the burial ground.

"However, in all my years as town chairman," said Braun, "I was never able to locate any of that money or to determine exactly what happened to it."

"Mr. Hiles had many virtues which will live after him," wrote the Centralia Enterprise and Tribune upon his death. "Let his faults be with his body." Lest anyone forget where that body lies, there is that 40-foot-tall shaft of granite, an obelisk to a man who would be king.



The Dexterville Mill

... The population of Dexterville is about 50 in summer and 250 in winter, yet there has never yet been a death or burial here. Mr. Hiles has resided here most of the time for 17 years. Somebody suggested that a corpse ought to be imported in order to start a cemetery, but this necessity will probably soon be obviated, as we understand a physician has recently settled there.

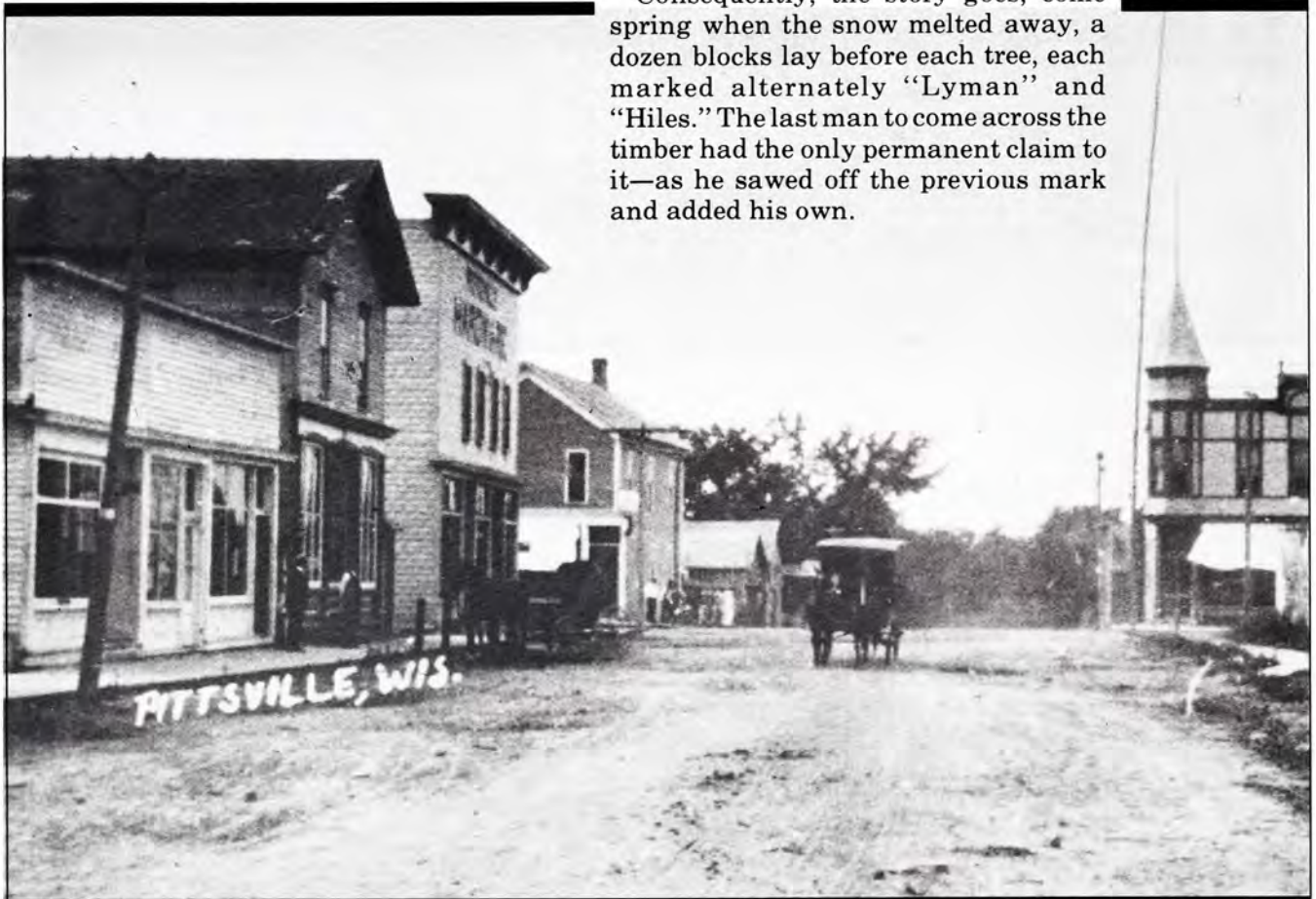
Green Bay Advocate, 1873

The Man Who Saw Hiles

It seems when old man Hiles started logging, he figured all the timber in sight was there for the cutting by whomever had an ax, since it belonged to the government anyway. All the logger had to do to claim the felled tree was stamp the butt with his brand.

About the time George Hiles was operating, so was the Lyman Lumber Company of Necedah. Lyman personnel also thought any tree was fair game as long as they got their stamp on it.

Consequently, the story goes, come spring when the snow melted away, a dozen blocks lay before each tree, each marked alternately "Lyman" and "Hiles." The last man to come across the timber had the only permanent claim to it—as he sawed off the previous mark and added his own.



George's son, Frank Hiles, told the story to Carl Ludwig. Ludwig, born Dec. 10, 1892, is one of the few living persons who has actually seen George Hiles.

Ludwig was only 4 years old when he saw Hiles arrive at the Pittsville depot. "I used to see him walk past with a gold-headed cane. He looked like a real aristocrat."

Hiles came to Pittsville once or twice a month, walking alone up the street from the depot. "He was a pretty good sized man," said Ludwig.

Ludwig also viewed the Dexterville sawmill. It seemed very large and at night was lit by electricity.

Hiles had a two-story office building of white brick near the sawmill and on the bank of a creek. As the flood wore away at the bank in spring, said Ludwig, the building fell into the creek.

Some years after the 1896 death of George Hiles, Ludwig became acquainted with Frank Hiles, who asked him to drive his 1910 Cadillac 30. Ludwig said the automobile had a four-cylinder engine in which each cylinder had its own copper jacket. A crank was required to start it, although the next Cadillac, purchased in 1913, had an electric starter.

Hiles lived in Milwaukee but came up in the summers to visit his farm. "That's a good farm I got," he used to say. "When it's wet, it's under water. When it's dry, the wind blows it away."

Frank Hiles was an easy-living, hard-drinking fellow. Ludwig said he never saw him do any work.

It was Ludwig's job to drive Hiles and his pals, Charlie Houston, Pat Keho, Pratt Wilsey and John Monegan to Rapids, by way of "Seneca Corners," while they drank.

Frank Hiles was pretty generous. He paid Ludwig \$5 a day—not bad in 1910.

Although much remains enigma, the fate of certain items in the Hiles inventory has been suggested.

The old Hiles mill, said Frank, was sold for \$50,000 to Harris Bros. of Chicago, who dismantled it, moved it to Canada and resold it for \$150,000.

The Hiles logging sleighs became the property of Ludwig's father, who cut them up for firewood after George Hiles took off the iron.

The safe from the office building was purchased by Ludwig's brother, Hercel, of Pittsville, who found it too rusty to use. Hercel said he inquired of Hiles' descendants as to certain papers found in the safe. They said to burn them.

The old Cadillac, said Frank's brother, Jim

Hiles, to Carl Ludwig, was bought by John Becker who used it to haul potatoes to Marshfield.

As for the fortune, said Jim Hiles, it became the victim of "slow horses and fast women."

More clues are provided by this anecdote.

"Frank Hiles was getting down pretty low," said Ludwig. "He owed me \$350, so he said, 'Carl, I can't pay you. Go out to the old farm and take what you can.' I took an old dredge that weighed six or seven tons because it was that or nothing and hauled it to Pittsville with a steam engine. Believe it or not, I sold it to old Stillman."

"Stillman didn't pay me but gave me a note for \$350 and died. One of the Beans came in and gave me a receipt saying he took the note and that's how it ended up. I never did get any money. I've still got the receipt though."

Until 1950, Ludwig lived in Pittsville. As a youth, he rode his bicycle down to the famous Babcock circus-train wreck. "Kids, help yourself," a man said, and they pitched in to the popcorn and Cracker Jacks.

"They made a road a few years later and dug up the skeletons," he said. "Some snakes got away and they never found them."

Most of young Ludwig's time was spent working in his father's harness shop. "We used leather from Tennessee in 200-pound rolls," he said. "My dad would cut it into different widths. The softer straps went into parts that didn't take much strain, such as back pads."

Demand for harnesses dwindled at the same time ready-made stock came out of Milwaukee. The Ludwigs went into the hardware and implement business.

The Depression of the 1930s proved to be a difficult period both for the farmers who "couldn't sell a calf for a dollar" and for the merchants who couldn't collect a dollar the farmers didn't have.

As was common then, charge accounts were offered to the many German and Polish yeomen who came in to buy milk cans, Fairbanks Morse gasoline engines or MacKinnon wagons. Although he sold his store in 1952, those unpaid bills outlasted some of the elements of the Hiles empire. "I've still got some," said Ludwig.

Switzers

Alois Huser had thought of going to South America, but he went to Altdorf instead.

"They thought they'd strike it better," said his son, George, of Altdorf, born 1888, not too far from St. Joseph's Catholic Church, southwest of Seneca Corners.

Alois had been manager of a silk-spinning factory at Altdorf, Switzerland, but felt that country was becoming too crowded. In 1884, he immigrated to Richmond County, New York, where he worked on a dairy farm that supplied milk to New York City.

After a year on the farm, Alois sent for his wife, Catherine, and their five children. "She packed up and come," said George. The trip took three weeks. Difficulties with the children were alleviated in part, Catherine later told her son, by the assistance of an old gentleman on board the ship, who had "helped her along."

Immigrants no more than set foot on America than they were assisted in another way, by land agents eager to send them to such wildernesses as Kentucky, Iowa and Wisconsin.

"The land was all wild," said George. "The best of the timber had been taken off but there was still a lot of good stuff left: oak, maple, birch and pine.

Huser chose Altdorf because his fellow "Switzers" had, by 1885, already been established there. As was the custom for those first farmers, who had only a few stumpy areas cleared, Alois worked to support his land by lumbering, in this case as an employee of George Hiles, who ran a lumber camp a few miles west.

George's brother, Casper, born 1891, lived in that camp.

When Casper was 4 years old, the cook got sick and a replacement was ordered—Mrs. Huser. "Oh my," she said. "What will I do with the two little boys?"

"Take them along," she was told. "They can sleep in the cook shanty."

So 4-year-old Casper got to live in a lumber camp.

"We slept on marsh hay," he said. The food was plentiful, including cakes, eggs, bacon, salt pork, beef, baked beans and a lot of sauerkraut. "Mother had it in 10-gallon barrels," said Casper.

Alois was a determined and progressive farmer who eventually owned more than 300 acres and two barns. He also built the first silo in Wood County, in 1887.

Huser read about modern dairying in Hoard's

Dairyman and practiced careful feeding and breeding techniques. Four or five of his 13 children helped milk the 40 purebred cows until milking machines became available.

George and Casper, along with brothers John, Henry and Carl, bought the farm in 1913 from their father and formed the Union Grove Dairying Farm Association. They also raised seed potatoes, winning in 1922 a Ford tractor as a prize for raising the best bushel of potatoes in central Wisconsin.

The Husers were also among the first to install drainage tiles on their farms, in conjunction with the then-new drainage districts.

At the Ruesch farm now owned by Tom Ruesch, the Switzers got together to dance in the "bowery," a roofed platform erected among the trees. "We'd go there and give 'er hell," said George. "Saturday night, they'd all come out to Vesper. Andrew Bissig would play the accordin. We wouldn't have danced much if there hadn't been beer."

Beer and other such beverages became hard to get during Prohibition. "Then they went into moonshine," said George.

"They found the biggest still in the country at Cranmoor," said Casper. "When the FBI smashed it up, I bought some staves three or four feet long and made a cow tank out of it.

"Most of the moonshine was around Pittsville. You'd go up to a farmer that you knew and could get it for \$1.50 per gallon and on up. The taste was pretty sharp," he said. "You light the thing and as long as it burns, it's all right."

Mail to Altdorf came by way of Elm Lake in the old days. The postmaster had to go the two or three miles by horse to the station, where he handed one bag of outgoing mail to someone on the train while grabbing another bag filled with incoming mail. The train did not stop.

George enjoyed a very brief career with the Great Northern Railroad. As a student fireman, he was required to shovel coal into the engine. "I shovel right-handed," he said, "but there you had to shovel left-handed. I couldn't shovel enough to keep a tea kettle going." Nevertheless, he talked the railroad into giving him a chance.

"We were going east into Dakota," he said. "The train was about a mile along. Boy, did it snort! Every shovel I threw in went up in smoke. Quickly, the train stopped and Huser's supervisor got off. Another train pulled up alongside.

When the supervisor returned, he said, "You



Casper Huser

Donald Mann, Casper Huser, George Huser (1914)

get out now and take that train and go right back; you got to have more steam than that."

After that, the most exciting event in town was the storm in 1944 that blew the church steeple into the cemetery in back.

"One Friday morning, my boy and I were cultivating corn," said Casper. "It was hot, so we sat resting in the shade of a cherry tree. I set my straw hat beside me.

"We started to work again and I forgot my hat. One thing I can do is forget," said Casper.

"The next day, I went out to work again, but clouds and wind came up so bad. My wife, she was walking on crutches at that time. 'You better take the children down in the basement,' she

said.

"She stayed upstairs because she couldn't go down with the crutches. I came back up. I said, 'If the storm won't hurt you, it won't hurt me.' Outside the window, branches came raining by.

"When it was over, the kids came up. One of them said, 'Why, the church steeple's gone.' The neighbors' barn and other buildings were gone. My hay wagon turned upside down.

"On Monday morning, I told my boy where I had left my hat and that I wanted to go out and look for it. He just laughed. We went anyway.

"The tree was broken off by the wind," he said. "Even the oak tree had been knocked down. But my hat—it was lying just where I left it."

To Dream

Sometimes Clarence Brovald, 97, lies in his bed at Edgewater Haven Nursing Home in Port Edwards and doesn't sleep a wink. He just dreams.

"I think all night sometimes of my life from when I was 3. I'm almost 100 years old. I remember the Wright brothers trying to learn to fly. Automobiles, television, radio: everything came on the earth during my life."

Brovald's Norwegian father, Andrew, sailed the sea in wooden ships at the time of our Civil War. His mother, who worked in Chicago, rode streetcars pulled by horses.

The father was self-educated and intelligent. He sat up until midnight reading and knew as much as the preachers about the Bible. During the Spanish American war, he went every day to get the Pittsville newspaper. He was a good carpenter and a beekeeper, "a good man in every way."

"I wish I could talk to him again," said Brovald.

Clarence was born in 1886 at Stoughton. When he was 9, his family moved to a small farm at Belleville because Andrew wanted the boys to live the rural life.

"In 1898, we came up here," said Brovald. "My father heard about making farm land out of cranberry marshes. It looked black but it wasn't like the soil they thought it was."

At the 200-acre farm six miles southwest of Babcock on the Milwaukee Road rail line (now Highway 173), Brovald still gets a chill when he remembers the sound of wolves howling.

His father kept bees. When the hives were smashed, he suspected vandalism and spread sand around to catch the tracks next time. It was a bear.

"There were quite a few Indians in those days. They came every year to harvest cranberries. When we plowed high spots, we dug up lots of arrowheads and pottery."

Babcock at that time, said Brovald, was a railroad town with a roundhouse that had stalls for eight engines, a big depot divided into one end for women and one for men, four saloons, four hotels, and one barber shop that offered a shave for a dime and a haircut for two bits. There was a rescue home for pregnant women.

To get the mail, Brovald had to go a mile south to Daly station, which had a post office and the ruins of a sawmill. Past Daly three miles was Meadow Valley. "There was a store, a schoolhouse, a little farming. Quite a few people then and not a soul there now."

From Daly, a ticket to Babcock cost 13 cents. To Meadow Valley was 10 cents. If the family went to Babcock to the Congregational church, they took the horse and buggy.

"They used to say the fastest a man could go was as fast as a man could run," said Brovald. When he got his first car, a new \$380 Model T in 1916, he had to put it on blocks as soon as the snow came because the roads were not plowed. Travel was on top of the snow, by sleigh or snowshoe.

"I used to sell pigs to a packing house in Grand Rapids," he said. "Up one day and back the next by horse and wagon. I would stay at the Commercial Hotel, 50 cents a night, 25 cents a meal."

Brovald became a progressive and resourceful farmer. He ran a 12-cow dairy from 1933 to 1950 and drove one of a succession of new cars to Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids to sell cream. If he brought strawberries, too, "they'd see 'em and they'd want 'em."

In 1912, Brovald got a gas engine to pump water, "when they first got gas engines." When they first got generators, he got a generator. The basement was filled with batteries for one of the few houses with electricity.

To raise cauliflower, Brovald blanched it by tying the leaves together with inner tube strips and sold it by the ton. He put an ad in the paper and hauled cabbages to Necedah for housewives anxious to brew kraut. "I made money every way I could," he said.

Brovald bought a couple of timbered forties for \$1 an acre and sold the lumber to a Necedah box factory before selling the land for \$10 an acre.

He raised 11 acres of string beans that required as many as 75 pickers with whom he split the 5 cents per pound the Pittsville canning factory paid. He said in one day he made \$250.

Besides his first wife, Mae, Brovald had help from hired hands at \$25 per month. His only son

died at age 17. In later years he was ably assisted, said Brovald, by his grandson, Dave Van Wormer, who had moved to the farm with his mother, Brovald's daughter, Dorothy. From his start driving a tractor at age 8, Van Wormer "was like a son to me."

Another way Brovald made money was by playing host to deer and prairie chicken hunters from Milwaukee. "The place was flooded with prairie chickens," he said. "I would take the hunters out with a wagon. They always had a case of beer and a case of pop. They'd circle around and come back for a beer."

Most hunters got their limit of 25 chickens to take home in a string-tied bundle. Brovald said the hunters paid generously and usually left behind several articles of clothing that fit him pretty well.

Before he started farming, said Brovald, he worked a dredge for the Arpin company on the Yellow River Drainage District project. When he retired from farming in 1950, he drove tractor and truck for the Arpin/Brazeau cranberry marsh.

Brovald's wife, Mae, died in 1959. He then married another local girl, like his first wife a schoolteacher, who "was with my sisters so much everyone thought she was my sister too." Her name is Bertha and she, at 94, still lives with Brovald.

While farming, Brovald built eight barns and sheds. All burned in one fire a few years ago. The house, which his father had built, escaped that fire but burned last year.

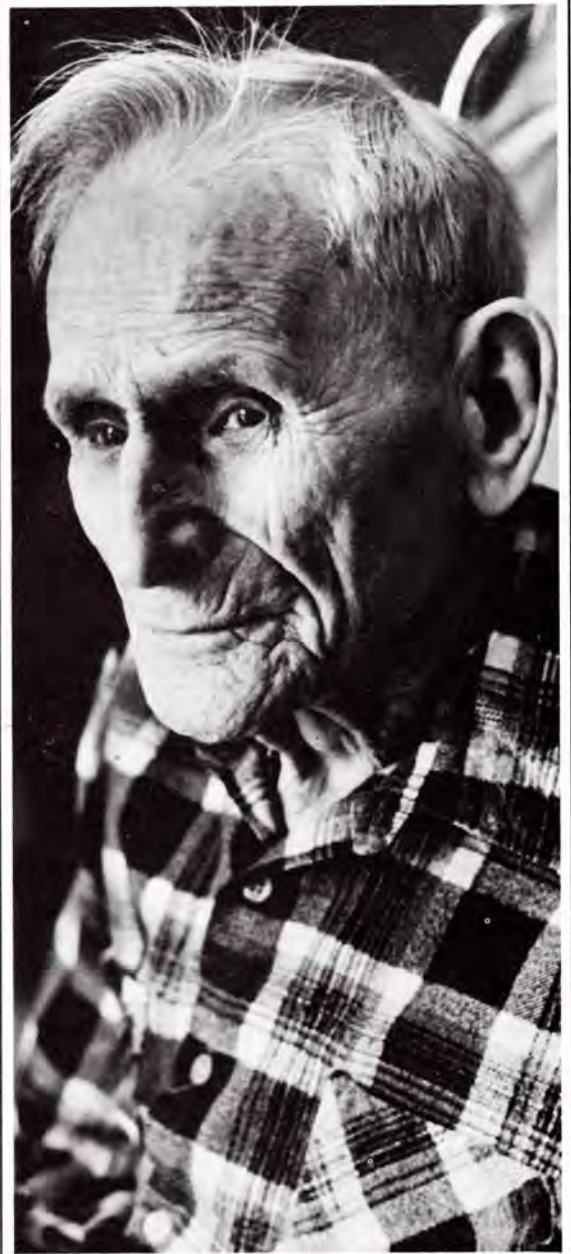
The farm is gone but not the images of 97 years. The new things, the inventions still are here.

It was at the 1931 Chicago World's Fair. A crowd had gathered around a man with a radio transmitter. "Who wants to be on the radio?" he challenged. Mae Brovald stepped forward.

By chance, Brovald's father, back at the Babcock farm, was listening at that moment through earphones to his battery-operated radio and heard his daughter-in-law's voice across the miles.

Something like that are the voices Brovald hears now and the faces, though he is blind, that he sees.

"The nights are so long that morning seems like it's never coming," he said. "I think all night sometimes about all the good times, the things that came in, the people, all gone now, my first wife, the neighbors, the old folks, children and all, all gone, all these people I would like to see, all gone now."



Heart of the Hunter

Today, Francis Daly Sr., 86, does what he has done faithfully every autumn of his adult life.

Rising in the dark, he dresses in heavy woolen clothing, eats a hearty breakfast of pancakes, bacon, eggs and coffee and goes hunting. At 6:30 he is at his stand, waiting for first light. Around 7, shots break the dawn silence. The day's first deer have been sighted.

Daly hunts, as he has for 44 years, at the grounds of the City Point Hunting Club, considered one of the oldest of its type in continuous existence.

Frank Fey, a member of the club since 1966, said "City Point" got its start in 1936, when his brothers, Henry and Manuel Fey, along with Leonard Bethke and William Huffman Sr., purchased 80 acres of flowage lands called "the 80" in western Wood County, south of Highway 54 between Dexterville and City Point, for \$300.

In 1939, Hank Fey, of Fey studios, and Manny Fey, of Fey Publishing, leased more hunting rights and founded a hunting club. Charter members included William Thiele, chief engineer at Consolidated; Thomas Utegaard, Thiele's assistant; John W. Watson of Johns Manville; T.W. Olson of Nekoosa Foundry; Earl M. McCourt of Consolidated sales; and Francis Daly, a businessman. Shortly thereafter, Arthur Clark and Nick Wallace took the places of Utegaard and Watson.

The original "shack" was indeed a rustic shelter of the classic tar-paper variety, thrown up by the boys for \$700. It had the customary wood cook stove and heating stove, pitcher pump, gas lantern and outdoor john.

The land was wide open. Frequent fires quelled the vegetative tendencies of the landscape and, on a clear day, you could see to South Bluff.

The combination of flatland and flowage produced ample ducks, prairie chickens and sharp-tail grouse. Deer were rare. A track in the snow caused considerable excitement.

Through the years, woods sprang up and overgrew the moors. Bog muck, cattails and weeds filled in the open water. Waterfowl and game birds diminished. At the same time, for the same reasons, the deer herd increased.

The land holdings also grew, reaching 2,400 acres.

The "shack" kept its name even after the origi-

nal burned in 1968 and a replacement resembling a well-appointed Boy Scout lodge was built, complete with modern kitchen, bathroom, television and bar on the main floor and dormitory-style rooms on the second.

As hunters moved or died, their rights were sold or passed on to family members. Present members are Ira Boyce, Sam Casey, Art Clark Jr., Francis Daly Jr., Frank Fey, Stanton Mead, Ted Olson Jr., Clarence Searles and Morris Wolcott.

Francis Daly Sr., while no longer himself a member, continues his association with the club. He is the only living original member.

Daly, a patient hunter and accurate marksman, has the distinction of having shot the biggest buck on record at the City Point Hunting Club.

The story might be told later tonight after all the hunters are in, how he went with Hank Fey, Ray Stellmacher and Stellmacher's son across a hay marsh at the north end of the property, up along the edge of an oak woods. Nearby, Rudy Exner waited for sight or sound of a whitetail.

How a big buck, bigger than any seen there, stood in the woods.

How Daly stopped his run and pulled his gun up, getting off a couple side shots as the buck leaped and bounded toward Exner.

Daly thought he'd missed. "What makes you think so?" said Stellmacher, a trapper by trade.

"He didn't drop his tail."

"That don't mean anything" said the trapper.

How in the meantime, Exner saw a doe and another buck coming his way and shot the buck so when Daly got there, Exner's buck and, to his surprise, the big buck lay dead.

How Daly still thought it was Exner who shot the big buck but the wise trapper followed blood trail to the point where Daly himself had shot.

How it was Daly's buck all right. A 10-pointer, it dressed out at 170 pounds.

This year, the stories will have another theme. The City Point Hunting Club is up for sale and an option to buy has been taken. It is expected that a cranberry marsh will be developed on the premises.

Daly says this will be his last year hunting. But he has said it before.



City Point Hunting Club

Henry Fey, John Watson, Earl McCourt, Ted Olson, Francis Daly, Sr. (1939)

At 2:30, he will get out to his stand to wait for the deer he knows are about to come out for their evening feed. "You learn their habits," he says, "the buck signs, the crossings."

As he sits, the chill of the coming evening asserts itself but he is warmed by memories of dinners, drinks, friends hunted with and lost, friends hunted with and reunited, words, weather, wilds without women, the smell of wet wool by the fire, coffee, clear crisp Novembers and big bucks.

It doesn't matter for how many years the ritual has come around. The hint of big game approaching warms the heart of any hunter.

Main St., Nekoosa

Shouts of "runaway!" sounded as a black stallion hitched to a "democratic wagon" driven by a woman from the Bohemian settlement ran out of control toward Big Bull the Butcher's Nekoosa ferry. On the seat beside the woman lay her infant daughter.

Over the ferry went the horse and wagon into the river. The wagon was being pulled out. The horse was drowning and the woman cried, "Where's my baby?"

"We saw something floating," said Sid Brooks, a resident of Nekoosa for over 90 years. "Orie Billings and I took a boat and got the baby and Dr. Pomainville said she was OK. There were groceries and a keg of beer that we didn't get."

Brooks managed the Nekoosa exchange of the Wood County Telephone Co. for 40 years. He served three years as village clerk and 17 as city clerk.

When Brooks started as telephone exchange manager, he had 154 subscribers. That was in 1917. At the time of his retirement, there were 1,226 subscribers and 10 operators.

Beginning in 1919, Brooks served on the volunteer fire department, which he said was organized in 1900.

"Firefighting equipment at that time consisted of two light carts, one horse drawn and one a man-drawn affair on which the hose, nozzles, hydrant and wrenches were rushed to the scene of the fire. Later, other articles were added, such as a bell to sound the alarm, pails and lanterns."



Sid Brooks, Jo Kaja, Emil Ulrich, Daro Buchanan, Leo Huber.

Brooks was born on the family's town of Seneca homestead. When he was 3 years old, his father, Charles sold the farm because there wasn't a public school nearby. The family moved to Nekoosa where Sid attended a two-room school.

Brooks recently took an imaginative walk up "Main Street," as Nekoosans call Market St.; he remembered a dirt road with high wooden sidewalks.

He listed some of the buildings going west from the river. "Starting at the south side of Main Street, there was the Congregational Church, then Frank Christenson had a residence and a pump with good water.

"The village had a two-room fire station and jail. Next, Herb Lapham had a residence and livery barn. Eli Taylor had a boarding house and Frank Boles, a residence.

"Nekoosa didn't have a bank. The merchants had to go to Grand Rapids for money to cash checks.

"There was a road from Main Street to the first bridge (Alexander Avenue). There was a swimming pool in the park. And the Nepco office and mill.

"Crossing the mill yard, you came to a two-story cement building, where R. Fagan had a restaurant and Dr. G. Pomainville had his office. Then, J. Mlsna had an electric shop and the Marcoux building. Next, the J.M. Johnson barber shop and Korbol's grocery store, which had upstairs L. Good's printing office, where he printed the Wood County Times, a weekly newspaper.

"Neal Crowns had a hotel and Dick Schirle, a saloon.

"Then, there was a street running to the mill from Market Street, where Polzin had a building, where he sold farm machinery. Gavre had a residence and butcher shop. James Withers had a residence and shoe shop. August Brandecker had a residence and tinsmith shop, on the corner of Main Street and Point Basse."

Going west on the north side of "Main Street": Stevens' livery stable and machinery store. Then, Vilas Avenue.

Bulgrin's hotel. Otto Sievert's two-story building. Charles Brooks building. C. Thompson's shoe and harness shop. Residence owned by C. Brooks and rented by D. Buchanan for a restaurant. Huber's general store.

John Lawrence's shoe and harness store. A.E. Lapham's drug store with post office and telephone switch box.

On the next block, the Herrick hotel. Kleberg's hardware. On the second floor, H.E. Fitch law office. Ferd Polzin's restaurant. F. Grode's barber shop and cigar factory. Frank Boles' saloon and bowling alley. Brooks Bros. store and dance hall.

Across Alexander Avenue, Zurfluh's tavern. A doctor's office. Schraeder's store, Hooper's store. Gutheils' store. Davis and Brooks' store. The Northwestern depot. Soo Line depot and Chicago, Milw. & St. Paul station. At that time, the trains at Nekoosa made a loop and headed back toward Rapids.

At the loop, a feed mill, Bentz hotel and tavern, Polzin hardware, another tavern, the Brown barber shop and Frank Korbol store.

Nekoosa was a river town and its industry centered there; so did its recreation. Brooks said the skating was good.

"We would take up a collection and hire William Johns, with his horse and scraper, to clean off a large place so we could play hockey. We would get wood from the island and build a fire.

"Some people from Rapids built a house and a barn opposite the Catholic Church, only on the east side of the river. They would drive down and spend weekends there."

As Brooks explained, the Nekoosa community on the west side of the Wisconsin had its beginning with the establishment of a paper mill in 1893.

In pioneer days, Nekoosa, known as "Point Basse," was on the east side of the river, near the tavern opened by Robert Wakely in the mid-1830s at the lower ferry crossing. It was the first inn in Wood County.

Brooks said the first sawmill on the Wisconsin River was erected by Daniel Whitney and his nephew, David, in the early 1830s, on a Nekoosa site. He said the first log house in what was to be Wood County was also there.

River history was further enhanced, said Brooks, by three steamboats shuttling from Galena, Ill., to Nekoosa in 1841 and 1842. That was as far as they could get before traffic stopped at the rocky chutes collectively known as the "grand rapids."

Our Lady of Rudolph

Glass, shells, flowers, shrubs, mosaic, trees, logs, insurance, sand, picture cards, gravel, mounted animals, wiring, Carrara and composite statuary, labor: Father Philip J. Wagner's obsession with his grotto was getting on the bishop's nerves.

"I hearby solemnly tell you that you are to cease any building henceforth of any nature in regard to that shrine and that you are to proceed immediately with plans for a suitable church," wrote Bishop John P. Treacy of the Catholic Diocese of La Crosse in 1949.

"I am constantly getting complaints from the poor people of your parish who are suffering in that miserable basement church after all these years while the most elaborate developments are going on in this series of caves which to me are perfectly nonsensical," said Treacy.

Nevertheless, Wagner, with the support of his congregation, persevered in his Rudolph endeavor. Perhaps most persuasive to the diocese was his argument that the grotto was completely self-supporting and separate from the church treasury. "The building of the shrine is all my own, my own labor and my own finances," Wagner wrote. He had raised and spent \$47,000.

Wagner also built the church in question, in 1950, a year after Treacy's command. At one time named St. Philomena's, it has been re-christened St. Philip's.

The foundation for the grotto was laid in Innsbruck, Austria, where a young Philip Wagner, farm boy from Iowa, worked on his religious studies. An avid and long-legged runner, he competed in certain athletic competitions to excess. Wagner exhausted his body and suffered a breakdown of his physical health. He sought recovery at Lourdes, France.

"Praying devoutly, and taking baths at the famed shrine, I made a promise to Our Lady that if my health would be restored sufficiently to complete my studies, and to be ordained, I would somewhere, sometime build a place of veneration in her honor," Wagner told Treacy.

That Rudolph was to be his destiny, Wagner first heard from Bishop James Schwebach of La Crosse, where, as a newly ordained priest, Wagner acted as Schwebach's assistant.

"I have a place for you," said the bishop, according to Wagner's memoirs. "You better go to Rudolph; there are many good people there of various nationalities; you will preach only in English. The buildings are poor there; I want you to build a church and a school."

In 1917, Wagner went to Rudolph. At that time, the church and school were on Holland Road, now known as 5th Avenue. He had a new school built in 1920 at a new location—downtown Rudolph. The church itself he didn't get around to for 30 years.

One of the new priest's first pronouncements was that all children who wanted communion had to attend school. But to make things easier for some of the rural pupils, he picked them up in his automobile. Attendance rose from 75 to 160.

"Father's" love for children and their play was shown by the long slide he had constructed by the new school for them to slide down in winter after he dutifully iced it and by the large Christmas tree he placed on the landing inside the schoolhouse door decorated with wrapped presents, one for each child.

His love for travel showed in his weekly reminiscences to first- and second-graders of his European sojourn, climaxed by his enthusiastic vocal rendition of "Santa Lucia."

Father Wagner also loved hunting, especially for rabbits and squirrels. When possible, he aimed his shotgun out the back window of his quarters and blasted away.

In his later years, particularly, Father loved the written word. He composed autobiography and poetry enough to fill at least seven volumes of varying dimension.

With the possible exception of his Lord God and Lady Mary, Wagner loved most of all the grotto shrine.

"In the fall of 1928, with the faithful assistance of Ed Rybicki," Wagner wrote in "Milestones and Memories," his autobiography, "I began building a shrine here at Rudolph."

As much as Wagner conceived the obsession, Edmund Rybicki embraced it.

Rybicki was only a year old when Wagner came to Rudolph. He was 12 when Father asked him to help with the grotto. "He said he wanted to build a shrine, Our Lady of Lourdes."



Rev. Philip J. Wagner

So, the 46-year old priest and the 12-year-old boy went to work. The work went on until the priest died and continued after that. Rybicki, now 67, continues to lay rocks on projects planned years ago as "little by little" the shrine, like the cathedrals of Europe, reaches its culmination.

The land that is now a rock garden of earthly delights was first merely an open field. Virtually all the 40 or so varieties of trees now shading the pilgrim's way were planted. The exception is a locust-type tree that sprung up by itself, adorned with long thorns that look every bit like those shown on Christ's forehead prior to the crucifixion.

Two major accomplishments demonstrate the determination Wagner and Rybicki brought to bear on their shrine.

When Father got the idea for the Garden of Olives, he knew he wanted it enclosed. But he didn't know that the two would begin working in the center and would not reach the final circle until 20 years later.

Rybicki said he wondered if it would ever be finished. He thought about it at night, imagined what it would look like if it ever got finished, talked it over with Father and then they got to work—on what became the Wonder Cave.

The most trying single project for Rybicki was moving a 75-ton rock from north of Rudolph. He and George Gumz, Rudolph, went to work on it in 1953.

"Everything we borrowed to move it broke. The two of us worked the whole winter on it," Rybicki said. Finally, they had a special tackle block cast at a Nekoosa foundry and, with two 50-ton jacks, moved the rock a quarter of an inch at a time.

The last monument Rybicki completed before the death of his priest in 1959 was a three-section rock aggregation graced by three Cararra marble statues that Father had ordered years earlier. In the center is Wagner's grave. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord—Let them rest from their labors."

As Rev. P.J. Wagner, author, architect and founder, concluded in his poem, "The Grotto Shrine":

*In all my ramblings 'round this world of care,
In all my troubles here, or anywhere;
In all my hopes, where will I find content?
In worth-while deeds, in hours, and days well spent.*

A Little Moon

(Imagine a man, a car, a dark night way up the Rudolph side of the Wisconsin, a package passed out the window—a little moon bought to brighten a summer night at Riverview Pavilion. A few not-so-smooth draughts swallowed with eyes closed, not only of water but of fire. Whew!)

He installs the flask somewhere near his hip and joins the merry dance in the hall. It is a Polish wedding. He holds a near-beer (all else prohibited) and watches the bride's uncles, cousins and former suitors throw silver dollars at a china plate. Whoever breaks it may dance with the virgin and attempt to steal a kiss. Whether they succeed or not, she will be that much richer.

He finally finds his own silver and casts it at the plate. But his aim has perhaps been affected. The coin glances off and rolls like a sprung wheel across the maple floor. Another celebrant with less lunacy in him will kiss the bride this time.

So the action went for the adventurous way out among the farms and woodlots, the dirt roads and mosquito bogs, the pines and the sweet surprise of a Rudolph evening at John Molepske's dance hall.

Back in 1888, John Molepske had come with his parents from Poland to Wood County. As he grew up, John's interests ran to music; he learned to play violin, cornet, drums, piano and concertina some.

With his brothers, John played local weddings, the type conducted on a moving wagon. He had to play his cornet then. Nothing else would be heard.

John liked his music so well that when he took over the farm out in Rudolph township at the corner of what is now County Trunks O and P, John cleaned out his own granary for weddings, showers and just dancing.

The oats were stored upstairs. Many a dancer went home with a collarful of chaff shaken through the ceiling by the revelers.

Other problems came in the form of rough-necks such as Helmut Van Burlepsch, a German who specialized in running into posts with his head. He also offered to fight, dramatically

taking off his coat.

On such an occasion, one of the Mill Creek gang obliged by knocking Helmut out. He still was unconscious at the end of the dance.

Worrying particularly about the danger of some careless smoker starting the barn on fire, John decided to build an actual dance hall over by the Point road. The grand opening was held June 30, 1926. Admission was \$1 per couple.

Once in, you could disperse your funds at a slower pace. Soda pop, Baby Ruth candy bars and a glass of "near beer" were 5 cents each and hot dogs, 10.

Smokers might choose from Camels, Luckies, Chesterfields or Harvester cigars. Later, they might purify their breath with a stick of Juicy Fruit or Spearmint gum.

The dance hall had no electricity nor plumbing. Light came from kerosene lanterns, water from the farm a quarter mile north and relief in one of two wooden privies out back.

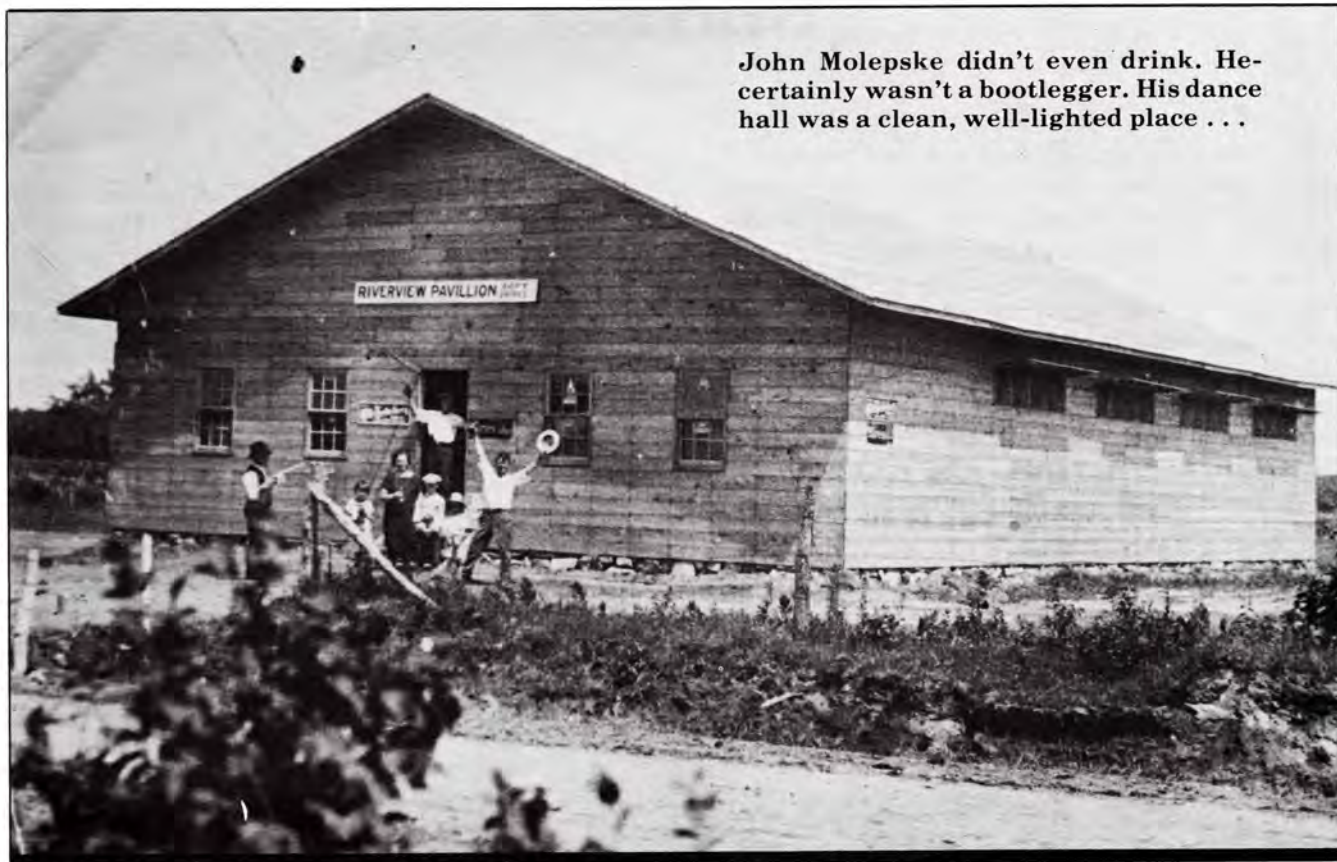
Over winter, John cut ice from the nearby river and stored it in sawdust for use in summer. Supplies were obtained during weekly trips to Wisconsin Rapids, seven miles away.

Stanley Molepske, born in 1909, used to play the concertina at his father's pavilion. He also acted as bouncer, although there usually was a constable on hand. If it happened to be big John Blonion, or Sheriff William Berg, a family friend, not much trouble was expected.

Stanley also acted on occasion as chauffeur.

One July 4th, a half-dozen girls who had been brought out from the fireworks in Rapids by some boys who had abandoned them when they found out the girls had to go home to Arpin, needed a ride home and Stanley took them in the '28 Chevy. When he got back, it was breaking daylight.

Because Riverview Pavilion was half-way between Point and Rapids, it was a logical place for boys from both towns to pursue their illogical rivalries, occasioned more often than not by real or suspected dalliance on the part of their intended sweethearts of the evening.



John Molepske didn't even drink. He certainly wasn't a bootlegger. His dance hall was a clean, well-lighted place . . .

Stanley terminated, temporarily at least, no less than one such fight and the consciousness of the pugilist by the judicious application of a blackjack he kept at hand.

Clarence Molepske, born in 1921 and owner of the later Riverside dance hall from 1958 until 1969, said that one frequent customer to his father's place enjoyed not only fisticuffs, but eating the chimneys that came with the lamps and washing the glass down with kerosene. That customer also liked to put his hand through windshields. It was another effect of the moon.

About the time Clarence reached the age of majority in 1939, roller skating was established to pick up business at Riverview. It was the only rink around and carloads of children came from all over. They included Clarence's future wife, Helen Beck, from Nekoosa.

Roller skating couldn't save Riverview, however. After the 10 Molepske offspring grew up and away, John, a widower since 1938, decided to

sell. Too many taverns with electricity, such as Skyway and Hillside, had opened.

Walter Tork wanted the building because war-time lumber shortages had made purchase of materials impractical. He cut the pavilion into three parts and hauled it to Harrison Street in Rapids, where it still can be seen, reassembled and sided with artificial brick.

The place it used to occupy is a weed patch studded with scrubby trees on the edge of Clarence's farm. He remembers how he used to sneak over to the dance hall parking lot and watch the bootleggers until his mother chased him home. The following day, he would seek out the same spots. On the ground, he found coins dropped during the previous night's deals.

Sometimes he might think if he went over there now, to the site of the old Riverview Pavillion, he would find some change still glinting, like the wink of time, in the glow of the moon.

Brazeau

To some, Theodore W. Brazeau had become “a spry old gentleman who could spin a captivating tale from the lore of years past,” said the Daily Tribune after Brazeau’s 1965 death.

But reminded the newspaper, “this elfin grandfather had attained enormous stature within and without his legal profession, and had indeed attained national renown.”

Brazeau is probably best known nationally for his introduction as state senator of legislation that in 1911 became the nation’s first workmen’s compensation law. On the 50th anniversary of that law, he was honored at the White House by President John F. Kennedy.

He also attained prominence for the successful prosecution of a murderer through purely circumstantial evidence, a case that was used as a model in university textbooks and featured in national magazines.

Brazeau successfully argued many civil cases in Wisconsin courts and on to the United States Supreme Court. He said he had tried 174 cases in the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which may exceed the total of any other attorney.

Gov. Walter Kohler Jr. on several occasions desired the appointment of Brazeau to the state Supreme Court, which the latter declined, not, he said, out of modesty, but because he had represented so many corporate interests.

Brazeau, as counsel and early stockholder, was a director of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., a director of Prentiss Wabers, president of the Central Wisconsin Cranberry Co. and vice president of Riverview Hospital. His law firm represented Consolidated, Preway, the First National Bank, the Marshfield Clinic and Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co., among others.



Nicholas J. Brazeau

Many local lawyers who have now attained their own measure of success think of Brazeau as their friend and mentor when they were young and immature.

In 1965, Judge Herbert A. Bunde wrote of Brazeau, "I well remember the first jury case I ever tried which was 35 years ago. I was scared to death because Mr. Brazeau was on the other side, but I found that this man, who at that time was known as the best trial lawyer in Wisconsin, had such a high sense of professional integrity that he, in no way, took advantage of my shortcomings and inexperience, and after the case was over, he took the time to visit with me and point out my mistakes and compliment me on the things I did well."

Brazeau himself had been very much a Rapids boy, born March 12, 1873, at the family house on Baker Street.

His parents had come to this city in 1867. Mother Margaret was born in Chicago, 1840, of Irish and Scottish immigrants. T.W.'s father, Stephen, or "Etienne," was born in 1832 at Montreal, Canada, leaving for Buffalo, N.Y., at the age of 12.

When Stephen came to Rapids, it was to join friends by the name of Pomainville. Much of the town was French at that time, said Theodore in an interview taped in 1958. St. John the Baptist day was observed fervently. Stores were closed and saloons opened wide. The streets were gaily decorated for the big parade.

Stephen Brazeau was a checker player of some fame and a barber by profession. Spring brought the big "harvest" when the lumberjacks came to town bewhiskered and bedraggled for a shave (10 cents) and haircut (25 cents).

Sixteen children were born to Stephen and Margaret, of which the second youngest was Theodore.

Thede attended Howe School in 1880 at age 7 and the Catholic school until he was 14. After graduation in a class of nine from Howe High School (1891), Brazeau worked in summer as a laborer on the city hall and as a clerk at the Arpin store.

In the fall of 1891, Brazeau "took" a country school in the township of Rudolph, at Doudville, to which he walked more than five miles each

way every day except payday, when he had to walk an extra mile for his wages. He moved on to the Ebbe school in the town of Lincoln, where he was paid \$38 per month, minus \$8 a month room and board.

With the encouragement of and a loan from J.D. Witter, Brazeau entered the University of Wisconsin in 1892. After two years of study, he went home to teach at Howe school and the 1st Ward school.

In 1896, Brazeau returned to the university, graduating with the class of 1897. He supported himself by tending furnaces, doing odd jobs and selling encyclopedias over the summer in Newark, N.J. The encyclopedias were published by his friend and another Rapids boy, F.E. Compton.

While in college, Brazeau played tuba in the band, debated, orated and edited the Daily Cardinal. An anecdote is related regarding his fraternity brother, George W. Mead I, in which they both act rather uncharacteristically.

It seems Thede and George had a couple schooners of beer and one said it was time to call it a night. The other agreed and they retired to their respective rooms. After an hour or so, Thede decided to return to the bar. When he got there, he found Mead, apparently satisfying a similar craving.

As a college graduate, Brazeau taught one year at Irving school before entering the UW law school, from which he graduated in two years, rather than the usual three, in 1900. He had an offer to join a law firm in Deadwood, S.D., but instead returned to Grand Rapids as partner of B.R. Goggins.

For a time, Brazeau engaged in politics, as Wood County district attorney from 1903 to 1907 and state senator from 1907 to 1911. He also served on the county board.

He continued an illustrious career until just before his death at age 92, more than fulfilling the promise of a 1907 Grand Rapids booklet, which said, "This is truly an age of young men. When the Senatorial District began looking around last fall for a state senator, it was no accident when they selected Theodore W. Brazeau, one of our most prominent young men."

The Magnuson Case

There were virtually no shopping days left in the Christmas season of 1922 as a secret sort of pseudo-Santa labored in his workshop. Necessarily meticulous, he fashioned the last working parts and fastened them into place. He ever-so-carefully wrapped the package and addressed it (he couldn't actually go down the chimney) and placed it in someone else's mailbox, so he couldn't be credited with the gift.

Something went wrong though with the Christmas plans and it wasn't until Dec. 27 that James Tarr went to his grandpa's mailbox in Cameron township to pick up some tardy Christmas cards and letters. Also in the box was a package wrapped in brown paper and addressed to Tarr's grandfather, "James A. Chapman, Marsfield, Wis. R. 1." The package was a little over a foot long, narrow and squared in shape.

Tarr set the apparent gift on the table. His grandma, Clementine Chapman, picked it up. She was anxious to find out what late lagniappe had been bestowed on them. Her husband was chairman of the county board and you never knew what might come in the mail.

She handed the package to her husband.

Chapman took the package on his knee as his wife looked on. He took out his knife and cut the string that went lengthwise. He cut two of the cross strings.

When he cut the third, the present exploded; it blew off Chapman's left hand, fragments of the bomb ripped into his wife. She staggered through the smoke into the bedroom. He crawled after her.

Tarr ran to the nearest neighbor and hysterically called Ole Gilberts at the Klondyke grocery store, "For God's sake, come up here."

The ambulance came and took the Chapmans to the Marshfield hospital. What was left of his hand was amputated. She, inflicted with injuries to internal organs, died.

Within days, the suspected benefactor was found.

It was John Magnuson, a Swedish-born farmer in the nearby township of Auburndale. He, a married man with three children, 44 years of age and a veteran of the Boer War, wasn't shy about the grudge he held against Chapman.

However, since the manner of the crime precluded witnesses and Magnuson coolly and staunchly denied any guilt, many observers doubted, even after Magnuson's arrest, the like-

lihood of a conviction.

Despite that problem, related the Daily Tribune of the spring murder trial, special prosecutor Theodore W. Brazeau, confronted with a pile of junk and a scrap of paper, "dug in with his characteristic thoroughness, and developed and correlated all the pieces of the bomb, the handwriting and the fragmentary evidence that was within his possession and worked out a case against Magnuson, which possessed no weak spots, no quicksand holes where a jury might sink."

"I regard it as the most finely prepared case and the most excellent exhibit of trial work that I have ever seen in my whole career," said the circuit court judge, Byron B. Park.

What follows is some of the evidence Brazeau compiled to have the "Yule Bomber" convicted and sentenced to prison.

Motives and threats: When Wood County laid out the Mill Creek Drainage Project with a ditch through Magnuson's 80 acres, Magnuson said that if he couldn't stop the ditch with a lawyer, he'd stop it with a gun. He also threatened Chapman, a member of the drainage board. Magnuson said the ditch would be used to transport Marshfield's sewage.

Destruction of dredge: In July of 1922, the dredge working the drainage ditch adjacent to Magnuson's farm blew up in the night. Magnuson had claimed he would destroy it.

Exhibit A: When asked to write "Marshfield" five times, Magnuson wrote "Marsfield." The package read "Marsfield." An expert witness testified that the misspelling was a Swedish trait. Magnuson was the only Swede in the area. Handwriting analysts testified that the handwriting on the wrapping matched Magnuson's. Le Page's glue was used to fasten the strings to the wrapping. A bottle of Le Page's glue was found at Magnuson's.

The bomb: Reconstruction of the bomb resulted in a 14-inch piece of white elm 1 1/4 inches square with a hole bored in the center for a brass tube. In the tube was a wagon bolt and spring. At the end, a gas pipe had been filled with T.N.T. A metal trigger was found along with part of a shotgun shell. In Magnuson's workshop were found white elm shavings, gas pipe, T.N.T. wrappers, matching metal, an exploded shotgun shell and a homemade trigger similar to that used in the bomb.

Pen and ink: Chemical analysis of ink found in Magnuson's daughter Ethel's fountain pen showed a blend of two brands identical to that used to address the package. A pen with a round point similar to the one used was also found.

The Boer War: Magnuson, although he had no patriotic interest in the conflict, had enlisted three times with the British in the Boer War. According to Brazeau, this resulted in his first "murders." Magnuson also gained experience in explosives.

Besides presentation of such evidence, Brazeau skillfully and doggedly cross-examined defense witnesses. One handwriting "expert" in

particular contradicted former statements and fell victim to his own inadequacies.

Attorney for the defense Charles Briere, with the help of A.J. Crowns, did his best to ridicule the state's purely "circumstantial" evidence. He also brought forth testimony regarding certain "strangers" who had been seen in the area and who may have committed the crime.

He said the testimony used was "rot" designed to hypnotize the jury. "Why wasn't an expert from Sears Roebuck called," he asked in sarcastic exasperation, "to show the spring used was the only spring missing from the box?"

But Brazeau's case proved overwhelming. The criminal had attempted, like old St. Nick, to remain anonymous in his philanthropy. In the end, he had left, among the smoke-charred cookie crumbs of his black Christmas, too many clues.



SWCHC

Arpin Creek

Arpin's Creek is now enclosed in a dark sewer. It is gone forever. It never carried any commerce—it was too small for that. It never turned a wheel of industry, but it furnished pleasure for little fish, and for frogs that sang in its ponds at night, and for the little boys that paddled and swam in its waters each day throughout the warm summer, without deed or lease, claiming it as their property. (T.W. Brazeau)

Like Theodore Brazeau, Everett Lambert believes history lies not only in narrative but in geography. From memory, interviews, maps and records, he has recreated the landscape of an earlier time.

A major source in compiling the accompanying map of Arpin Creek was a recollection by Brazeau. The occasion for the remarks in 1961 to the Wisconsin Rapids Rotary Club was the organization of the south Wood County Historical Corp.

"It is a natural human trait," said Brazeau, "to want to know something about our ancestors, about our history, about the geography of our city."

As an example, Brazeau described Arpin Creek, a clear, constant, spring-fed stream that began north of the "Green Bay" railroad tracks and emptied into the Wisconsin River "where Daly's Drug Store is now located just opposite the western terminus of Oak Street."

In its course, the creek formed four ponds: one under the railroad tracks; one in Arpin's pasture, called Arpin's Pond, one in back of the Christian Science Church, called Herschleb's Pond; and a fourth near the courthouse, called Sampson's Pond.

Joining Arpin's Creek at Sampson's Pond was Ticknor Creek, which began up by 8th Street and "came down through the old lumber yards to feed into Arpin's Creek just west of the present Courthouse.

"In the middle of Arpin's big field was 'Arpin's Pond.' The Arpins, John and Antoine were lumbermen who had a big cleared pasture just east of the Catholic Church where they kept their oxen and horses used for lumbering purposes," said Brazeau.

"If you had been travelling what was then called 'Milwaukee Avenue,' now back of old St. Peter and Paul Church and looked east from there about ten o'clock in the morning, you would see a group of boys crawling over the fence into Arpin's pasture.

"Among these boys were Puss Pomainville, now Dr. F.X. Pomainville; Ed Whitney, Ed Lavene, the son of the first sheriff of Wood County, Zeb Lavene; John Brundige, the son of the editor of the paper in Grand Rapids; and Charles Philleo, the son of H.B. Philleo who edited the Wood County Reporter in Grand Rapids . . . and A.L. Arpin, now a prominent rice grower in Louisiana and myself and brother Will."

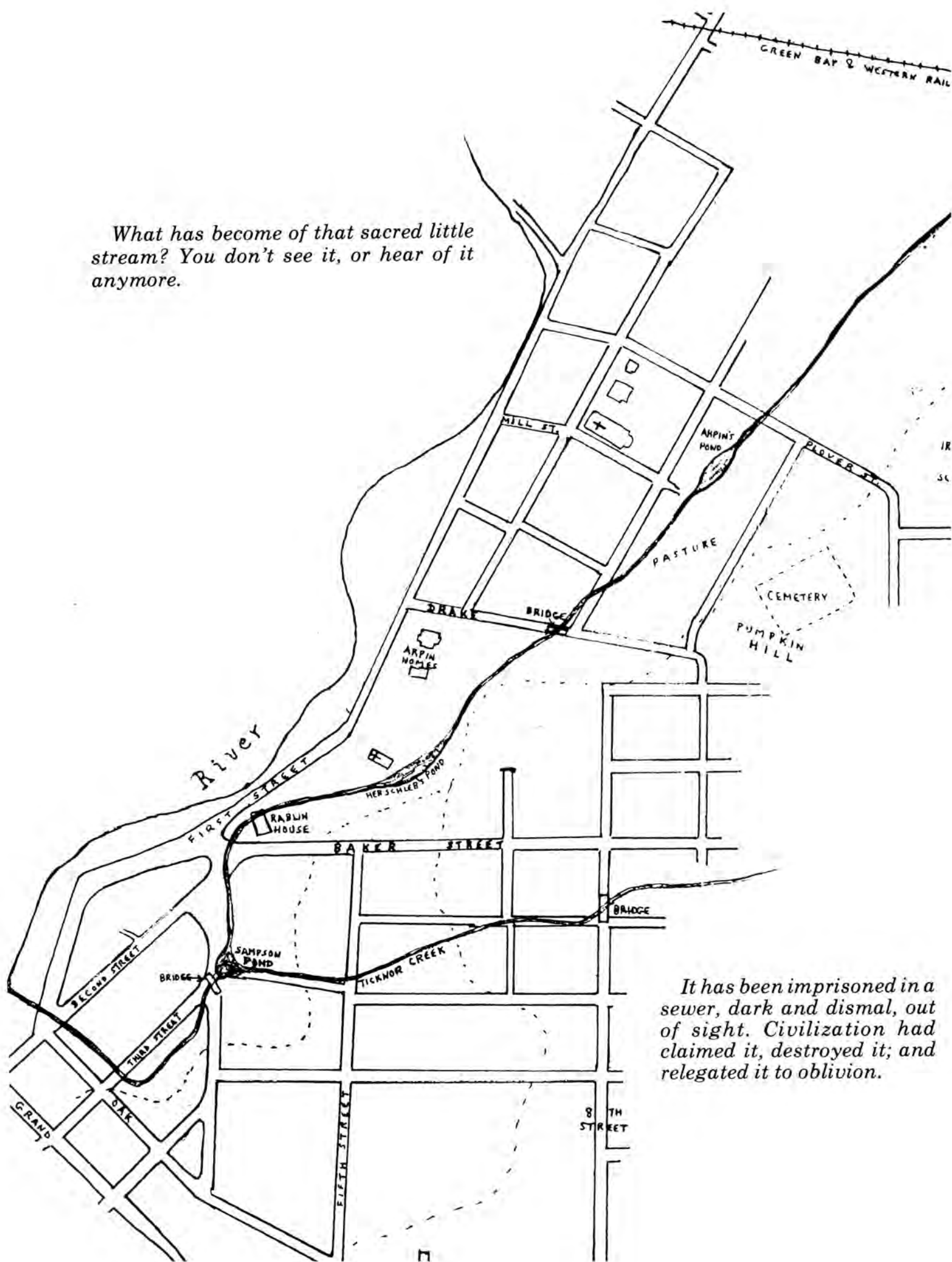
"The boys," said Brazeau, "had on shevy shirts and some a straw hat that was raveled from age. Others had an old felt hat which constituted a sugar bowl without a brim handed down from an older brother. There were just two pieces to their dress—the shirt and the pant! Shevy pants that had shrunk up to their shins."

At Arpin's Pond, the boys "plunged in with no restraint whatsoever—nobody to say nay or nobody to request or command us to put on our swimming suits.

"Little did I think when I was paddling around there in my early boyhood days that I would someday be involved as an attorney for Arpins in a supreme Court case concerning the title to that pond," said Brazeau. "We didn't care at that time who had the title—we had the undisputed privileges of the pond.

"We caught minnows in that creek for the older boys to take fishing; we waded the creek; we dammed it; we floated little rafts. We did everything there."

What has become of that sacred little stream? You don't see it, or hear of it anymore.



It has been imprisoned in a sewer, dark and dismal, out of sight. Civilization had claimed it, destroyed it; and relegated it to oblivion.

Men Will Be Boys



SWCHC

Down River from Pioneer Mill.

That boys will be boys and only if they are lucky will they grow up to be men is clearly demonstrated in the turn-of-the-century reminiscences of Edmund Philip Arpin, Jr.

“Grand Rapids, at that time, offered about all that a boy could hope for,” Arpin, born 1894, has written. “There was a fine river with good fishing, a foaming rapids with all its exciting temptations and also a good hill to slide down in the wintertime.”

Besides the river, there was a spring-fed creek that flowed through the pasture behind the Arpin house, dammed for a swimming hole in summer and a skating pond in winter.

“In the wintertime, we iced the hill on Drake Street, using water from the public spring-water tank and from our barn, all carried in buckets,” he said. “The steel-runnered coasters were 10 or 12 feet in length and were steered by the boy at the front end.

Hockey games above and below the dam on the river were sometimes disrupted by fighting when some kid got illegally bashed with a handmade

stick. “At one time I received a healthy clout right square on the nose that cut one side loose and required a rather makeshift straightening job by Dr. Looze and was never quite the same thereafter!”

Arpin said in an interview at his Neenah home that when the Consolidated dam was first built, ice piled up to such an extent that the “Green Bay” bridge was moved. While he and some other boys stood on the ice watching a “channel buster” in action, “we heard a hell of a roar and a heave and got our fannies on the pier just before the whole works went through the gate. We were within an ace of going through,” he said.

A favorite place to play was the barn left over from grandpa John B. Arpin’s lumbering days. In the two-sided lot (one for cows, one for horses) were ox yokes and shoes along with other relics of the pinery days.

Cradlerakes had been designed to catch the grain as it was cut by the scythe, “all of which meant nothing to us except that the tines did make ideal swords for our frequent ‘sham’ battles.”