

RCM III



Dave Engel



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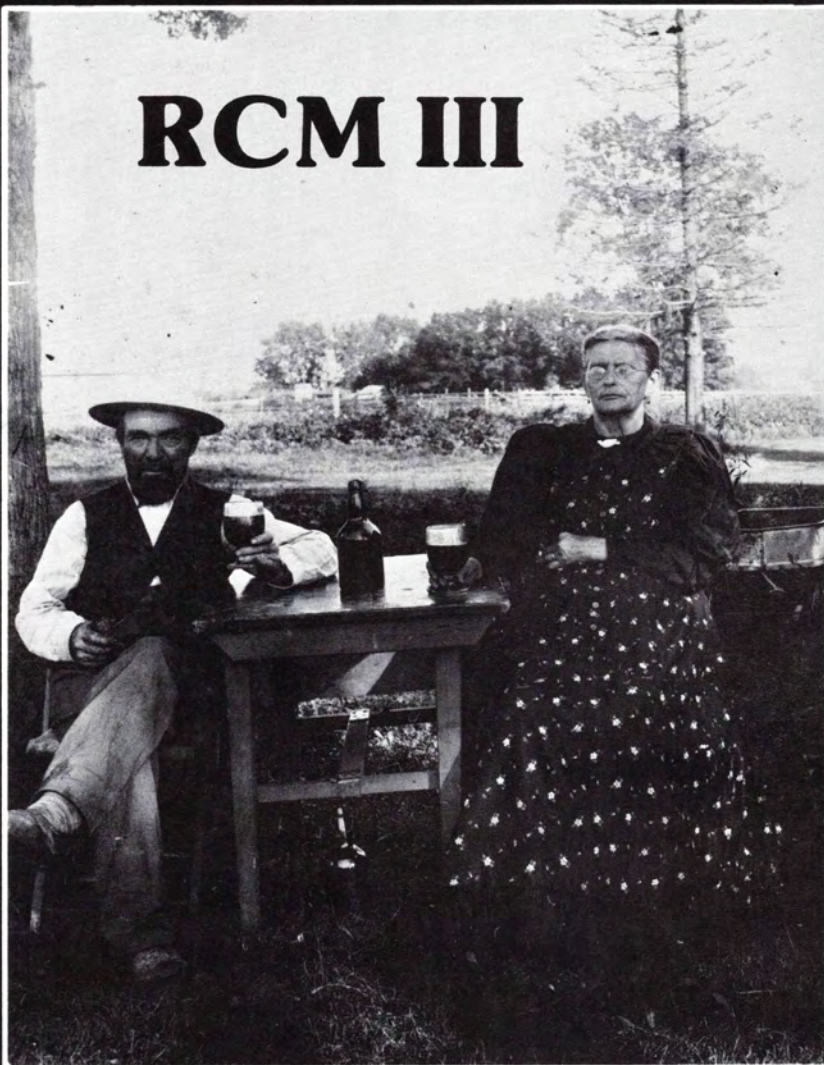
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RCM III



Cover: 1899 fire at Rablin & Robb foundry, 1st Street North

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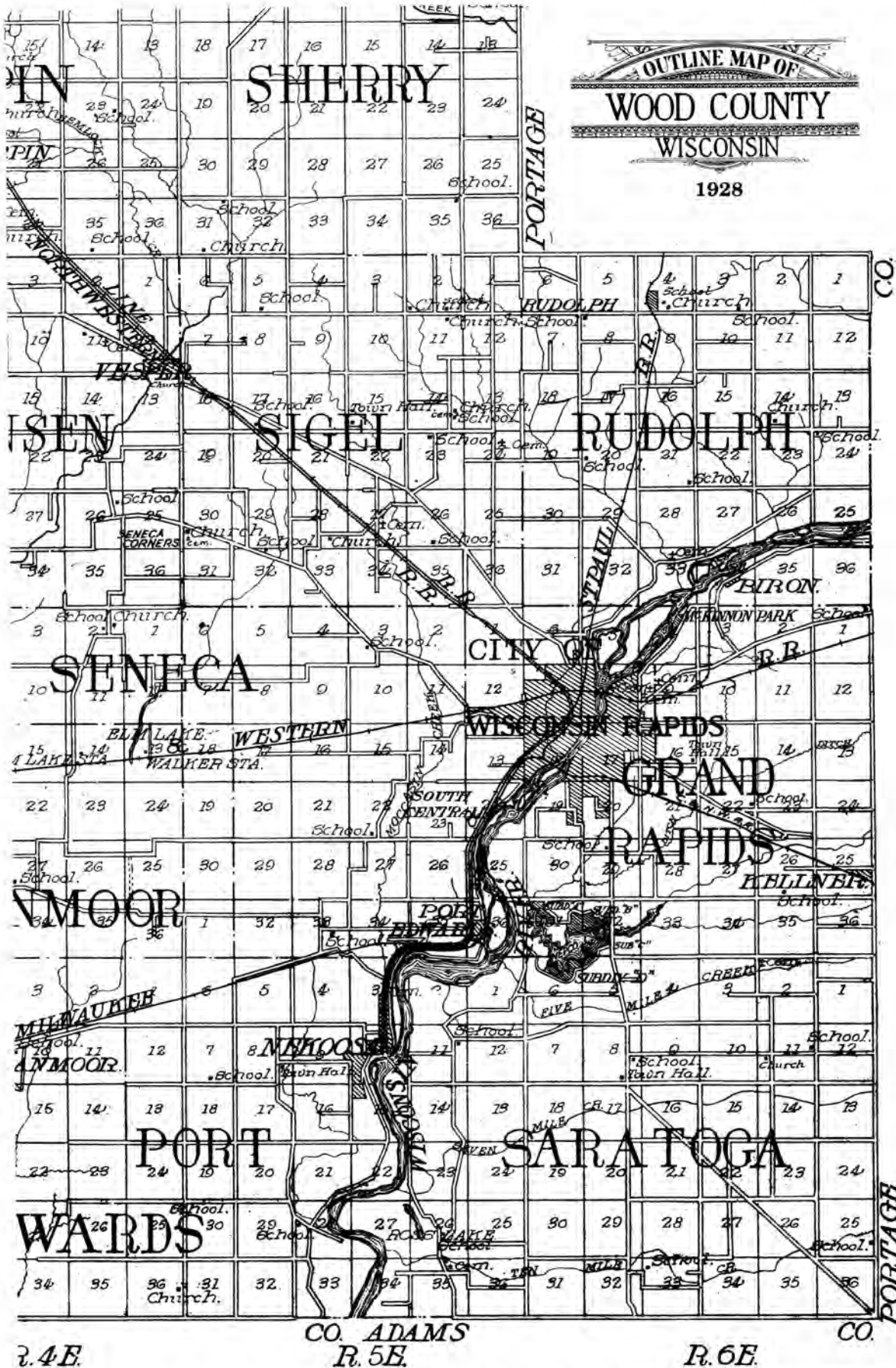
River City Memoirs Volume III

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

OUTLINE MAP OF WOOD COUNTY WISCONSIN

1928

Bruce Leberg



3.4E.

CO. ADAMS
R. 5E.

R. 6E.

CC

Grand Rapids

Like a woman, or any awesome natural force, our Wisconsin in a solstice season radiates beauty and comfort. Yet in the period of equinox, the river can knock a guy around pretty good.

That whimsy has provoked governmental attention. In order to prove the Wisconsin a navigable stream, the Federal Power Commission held a hearing in 1930. Power companies with dams on the river brought witnesses, long familiar with the wiles of the Wisconsin, to maintain she could not now nor ever be civilized. Included was testimony by Theodore W. Brazeau (1873-1965), the noted attorney. "I was born in Wisconsin Rapids, which was then Grand Rapids," said Brazeau, "a place I think then of about 800 inhabitants, with three or four saw mills; and the principal industry was lumbering."

Brazeau said he learned at an early age to swim in the river and spent all his boyhood along her banks, riding on rafts over the rapids when the jacks would let him stay on, walking on the log jams, watching men drive logs over the rapids, watching them raft and going on the rafts when they laid up, to get pieces of prune or dried apple pie, swimming off the rafts, riding logs, and entering 4th of July log-rolling contests. "I fished all along the river when I was old enough to carry a fishline in my pocket, and turned over the stones to get thunder bugs, and fished for bass, suckers in season. I went down the river in a

boat as far as Kilbourn with some boys, and camped on the banks. I went up the river above Biron and fished and camped."

Above Biron, said Brazeau, there were shallow rapids called Crooked Drive, which were bad enough but not as bad as those below. At Biron was a sawmill and a dam with slides to let the rafts through and rocky rapids below it. "Shortly below Biron you came to what is known as the eddy. Between there and Big Island, rafts laid up after going through the Biron dam to repair the pieces. There was always some grub or something that got loose, or something broke, and then they would gig back. They had what they called gigging cars. The old lumberjacks kind of liked the little boys and let us ride in the gigs into Biron. Gigs generally had three seats, and the men sat in those seats and went up to take the next piece down."

Below Biron awaited the "worst piece of rapids that I knew anything about," said Brazeau, referring of course to the great, granite, "grand rapids."

"The stream was tortuous and the rocks were rugged; impossible to navigate, or even go over with a raft without artificial help so they built little wing dams. There was a couple of brush dams that threw the water into a narrow channel, and there was another place where they had a sort of crib dam."



Running the Kilbourn Dam, on board the raft.

Brazeau said the rafts were taken through the channels at "German Rock" at high water. "In low water it was impossible and they took them over then with the wing dams and the chutes. These chutes were arranged with logs laid side by side, extending down a couple of hundred feet. On the end of those logs were fingers. Those fingers were like the fingers of a hand and they were loose, so that they could float up and down with the water."

After lumber rafters got below the main rapids, said Brazeau, they generally pulled in at the bridge here and laid up. Sometimes, while tied up, the water would "get away" from them and they would have to wait weeks "for water to get below them."

"Then we would swim off of those rafts, eat off the cook shanty, and have a good time," he said.

Just below the bridge was Neeves Island and a series of bad rapids. "The rocks were not as high, but when you didn't have a good stage of water you couldn't make it over there at all because the rocks were almost continuous.

Brazeau said there was a bad stretch at Hurleytown, on the south side, and a dam of some kind. At Port Edwards,

there was also a dam. "You went through there on a slide with fingers," he said. "One time when the slide got out of repair some way, they blew a hole in the dam, and turned the channel to go through there."

At Nekoosa was Whitney Rapids. Below Nekoosa, what was known as the Bayous. There, "they struck sand bars all through and in ordinary or low water you could not get a row boat through there without getting out and pulling it off or taking your oar out and pushing off the sand bars."

"When we got down to Kilbourn then we had a Dells to run," said Brazeau, "which is a narrow tortuous course, and many great fleets broke up on it, many men drowned and a great many men drowned at Wisconsin Rapids, in log driving and rafting."

To conclude his statement to the power commission, Brazeau said, "There has been no carrying of goods up and down the Wisconsin River. The only kind of traffic I ever saw, and that was one way, was lumber, logs and rafts. That was difficult, hazardous, expensive, great loss of the product, both of logs and lumber. As soon as they could find another way of carrying it, they quit."

The smallest component of a Wisconsin River lumber raft was a "crib" of planks pinned together with "grub stakes"—stout pegs fashioned from small trees. Planks were laid across the crib, which was then filled with 16 alternating courses

of lumber.

Six or seven cribs, each containing about 4,000 board feet of lumber, would then be fastened in tandem to form a "rapids piece." Two or three such pieces together comprised a raft.



The fleet just below the dam in the dells.

The Centralia Dam

"Making the first trip over the new dam at Centralia," reminisced Gustave Giese years later, "the crew was not feeling any too susceptible to dry jokes."

The dam had been built the previous season (1887) after the lumber rafts had gone down. It was much higher than the dangerous Clinton dam at Port Edwards and, said Giese, "there was no talk whatever among the men for no one had any idea of what we were up against."

With Giese in 1888, the Wisconsin's last rafting season, on the trial trip over the Centralia dam were Jack Claire, Joe Whitney, Frank Brown, Ed Wheelan, Hans Halverson, Bill Madline, dirty Jack Mullen, George Bennett of Baraboo and Charles Stainbrook. The first four were old river captains, said Giese, along to satisfy their curiosity. The second four were new men who had never been down the river before. Two of them quit for good after one trip. The other two quit after the second trip, both near-drowning cases.

Dams were provided with a "slide," over which went the raft or "rapids piece." When the first section crested the recessed slide, it kept going down until it hit bottom. All or partially submerged in the icy water, the men hung on for dear life to a "sucker line." For many neophytes, one trip sufficed. More-dedicated river rats "gigged back" upstream to ride another rapids piece down.

The year 1888 was not a good one for rafting. An ice jam in April not only took out the Grand Rapids-Centralia bridge, but also busted up John Farrish's lumber rafts waiting at the Biron saw mill. Twenty-four rapids pieces broke loose and scattered for 20 miles downstream.

Other obstacles were man-made. An April 28, 1888, Centralia Enterprise and Tribune described the Centralia Pulp & Water Power Co. dam, built the previous year. Two and a

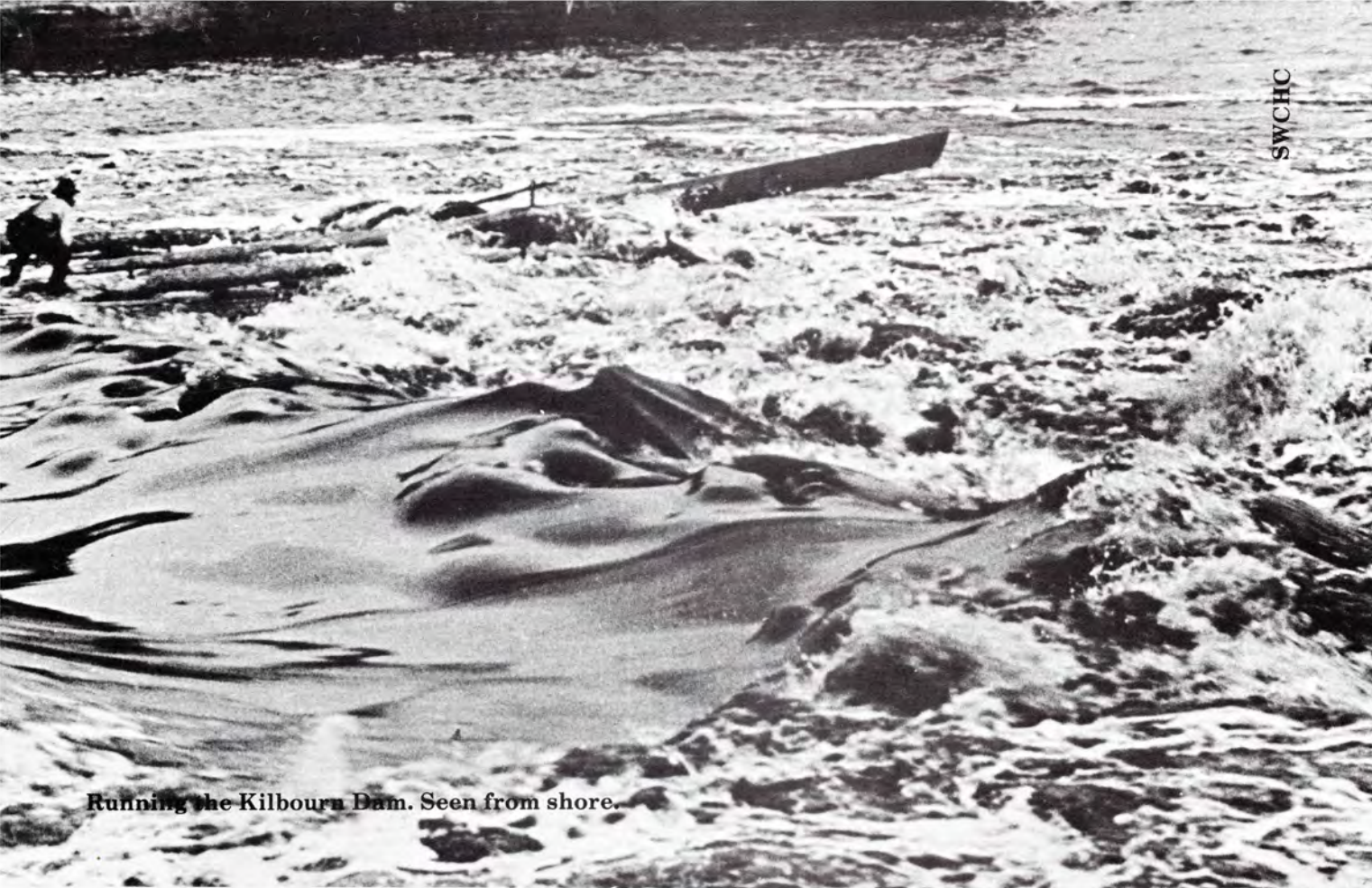
half million feet of W.H. Cochran's lumber waited above it in rafts. A few days earlier, three trial rapids pieces had been successfully sent over.

"The water is high and strong," wrote the Enterprise, "and while the experiment shows that the slide has been properly constructed, it requires the cool judgment and knowledge of a thorough riverman to steer a heavy raft in safety over the raging waters of the old Wisconsin, where they rush through a narrow passage at the rate of forty miles an hour."

"Another fleet of lumber rafted last fall, the property of Mr. J. Farrish," continued the Enterprise, "will also have to be run over the South Centralia Dam. We hope that it will meet with as good success as that of Mr. Cochran."

The rival Wood County Reporter of Grand Rapids, across the river from the Enterprise, offered a more jaded view. "We learned from rivermen in Centralia and Grand Rapids who have run the Wisconsin river for years that this slide is the most dangerous as it now stands of any on the river . . . that they run a piece of John Farrish's lumber the past week and they stove the front crib and next to the last one all to pieces . . . the lumber just buries itself under water at the foot of the slide, and men actually stand in danger of their lives."

The Reporter accused the Enterprise editor of a special interest in the Centralia dam and continued its attack on May 24. "Every piece of lumber run over the Pulp mill slide at Hurleyville, belonging to Mr. John Farrish, has been more or less broken up. The rivermen have become disgusted and insist that they are entitled to extra pay for rafting the same. "While running the slide Monday four men were thrown into the water. The rivermen stand in fear of danger running every piece of lumber."



Running the Kilbourn Dam. Seen from shore.



Handspiking off a bar. A heavy lift.

Two days later, the Enterprise said Cochran's rafts had been run over the South Centralia dam without much damage. "An immense volume of water passing over the slide through a comparatively narrow channel, caused, however, the forward cribs to dive below the dam and the front oars to break."

A portion of Farrish's lumber, having been assembled in rafts the previous summer, was also run over, "and it appears that all the hind cribs were badly broken."

"Mr. Farrish has yet a number of rafts above the dam and another fleet in waiting at Biron's mill," said the Enterprise. "It is also stated that J. Edwards and Co.'s little dam is, on account of a part of the large dam below being taken out, a bad place to get over. It would seem as though lumbermen and mill men had more than their share of trouble this spring."

That "trouble" was responded to dramatically and controversially.

"On Thursday evening last," said the Enterprise, "a hole about fifteen feet wide was blown out with dynamite in Messrs. J. Edwards & Co.'s little dam, to open a passage for Mr. John Farrish's lumber, in obedience to the latter's orders and in disregard of Mr. Edwards' protest."

"The use of dynamite to force solutions and remove obstructions," opined the Enterprise, "will be considered by many as an unwholesome precedent, when more conciliatory means are within reach."

With more dams obstructing the passage of wood, it was probably fortunate that the raw material had been largely exhausted. "Even if we had the timber we would not put it on the river," said Giese to the 1930 Federal Power Commission hearings. "They have the railroads, and they will never use the river again for rafting."

"The pine that we have now, that will be used by the paper mills. By the time we get any more timber, by that time we will have airplanes that can carry several thousand feet, so the river will never be used again for that."



SWCHC

Cook Mike Lane and cookie Ashley Bennett.



SWCHC

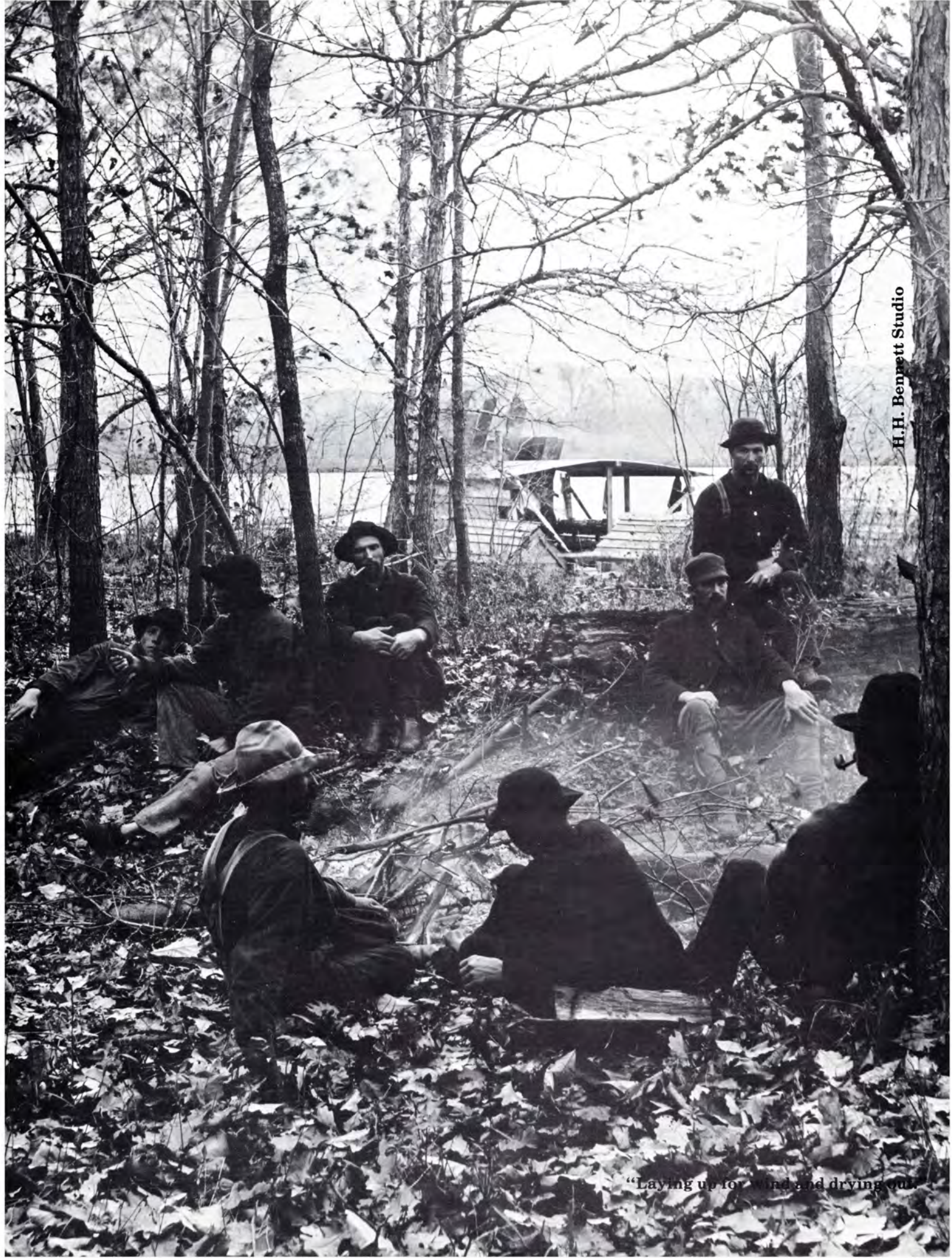
Muscular vigor in repose. Antoine Arpin, rear.

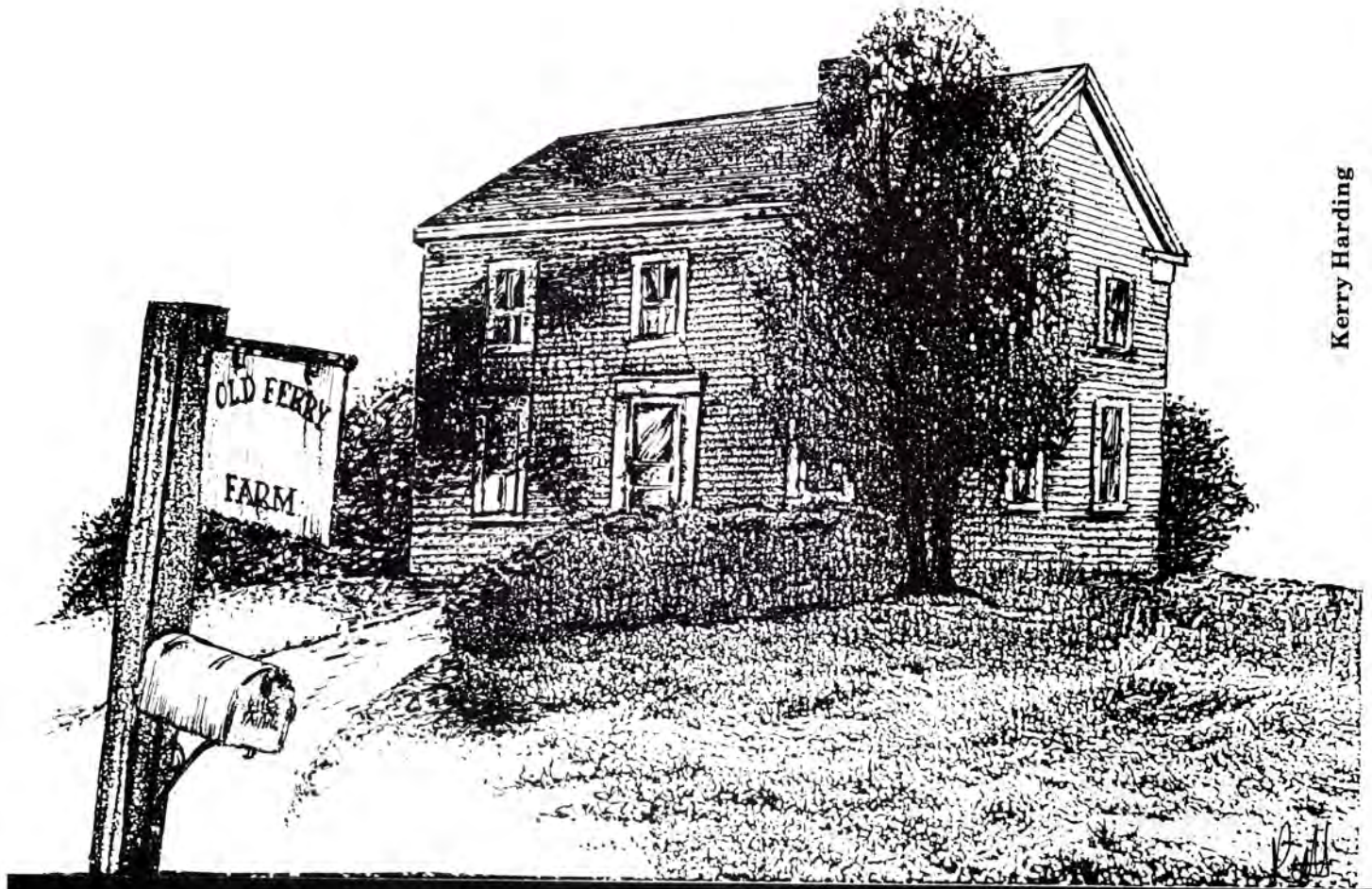


SWCHC

Dick dancing for the boys. Dick Stevenson dancing, Zack Dugas, left, clapping, Jack Warnock, sitting facing camera. Big Archie Young near center pole.

"Laying up for wind and drying out."





In the 1890s, a ferry crossed at Wakely's.

The Wakely House

There is a place in the backyard of River City where the imagination may be emancipated from 1984 to other times, when wandering hunters arrived by pony or canoe to trade, drink, play and even die, when New York entrepreneurs sailed in by barge, wagon or steamboat to turn shingles into gold, when pinery boys rode down by rapids piece through the last white water to eat, rest and raft up again. All manner of travelers were to stop here: homesteaders, journeymen and missionaries. Already on the National Register of Historic Places, this is the premiere historical site of central Wisconsin, the venerable and stately Wakely house.

Located on the east bank of the Wisconsin south of Nekoosa, the relatively small Greek Revival structure hosts a crowded history on both sides of its walls. Considered by historians to have been built in 1837, it is the oldest building in Wood County and has been called the oldest frame house in Wisconsin.

In recent years, the Wakely house was inhabited by Col. and Mrs. Charles Otto from whom Nekoosa Papers Inc. acquired the property in 1972, allowing the former owners to continue to reside there. Now that both Ottos are deceased, the house is vacant and, consequently, endangered by weather, disuse and rot.

With the indulgence of Don Krohn, manager of public relations at Nekoosa Papers, I stayed at the Wakely house one night under a full spring moon. While outside, bats squealed and beat their wings as they streamed from the decayed gable, inside the rooms were silent. In the low-ceilinged second floor, I watched and listened for ghosts. All that moved though was my shadow; the only footsteps that night were my own and too soon I fell asleep.

In its other days and nights, the Wakely house was loud enough with French, English, Indian and immigrant voices. They had slept in these rooms, adjacent rooms and all over this property.

One frequent visitor was Simon Sherman, a lumberman from Stevens Point, who refers several times to the Wakely place in his journals.

In 1844, said Sherman, Maria Anson, young bride of a lumberman, traveling north from

Grignon's, "another French and Indian Half Breed stopping place," suffered a transportation breakdown in a severe snowstorm and her party did not know whether to return or go forward. After two days, Mrs. Anson decided to go on and that night arrived at Robert Wakely's at the geographic location and settlement called Point Basse, just below the last rapids on the river.

Mrs. Wakely was the first white woman Maria had seen since leaving Portage. Overjoyed to find a woman of her race and one who could talk English, Maria stayed at Wakely's for a week until her husband came for her.

Sherman also documents business done with Robert Wakely and Wakely's son, Chauncy, who was paid \$80 in 1863 for "steering" lumber rafts through the Grand Rapids.

On June 2, Sherman went to "Point Boss" where he took a crib of lumber across the river. The "boys" "lost" half a day of work and Sherman stayed at Wakely's that night. The next day, he ran three rapids pieces and credited "the boys" with a half day of work. On June 4, he ran three more pieces and paid Chauncy Wakely \$12, buying also \$5 worth of supplies from Robert Wakely.

In another story of frontier hospitality, Sherman tells of the experience of Mrs. David Whitney, her husband an early lumberman on the river who "started down the river I think on the first fleet of lumber and before he reached the shot tower (at Helena) he was taken sick with the bloody dysentery." Whitney there was taken to the house of his partner, A.B. Sampson, where he continued to get worse.

Sampson became alarmed and wanted to send for Whitney's wife up at "the mill" near Wakely's but Whitney figured "it was not the best as the distance was so far through an unsettled country and no roads and the only way a person could get there was by boat down the river. Having the Dells which are 5 miles through to pass and the annoyance of flies and mosquitoes which would be a great undertaking for a woman and he thought he would soon be better."

Whitney continued to decline. The next day Sampson sent a messenger to Mrs. Whitney with the news. To hasten to her husband's side, she found it necessary to leave her three children

with a friend, Mrs. Mary Wakely, although a daughter, Harriet, was as sick as Mr. Whitney and not expected to live.

Mrs. Sampson "got a Frenchman and an Indian with a small birch-bark canoe and started that night on their perilous trip down the river." They rode all night and all the next day until 9 o'clock at night when they arrived at Helena. The next morning, Whitney died.

While she attended to her husband, Mrs. Whitney heard that her daughter, Harriet, had also died. Mrs. Whitney returned up the river—a trip that took several days because they had the current of the river to contend with. Upon her arrival at Wakely's, little Harriet, believed dead and buried, rushed out to meet her mother, a surprise and great joy to Mrs. Whitney.

Mrs. Whitney's brave travels occurred in 1838. The wilderness was dark and deep but, up at Point Basse, there was a light in the woods. It came from the same house that still stands alone in our history, the Wakely place.

Point Basse

Almost immediately after land here was opened to white settlement, Robert and Mary Wakely sold their farm in New York state, bought a raft of lumber, sold the lumber in Cincinnati and came to Wisconsin territory, poling up the Wisconsin River in a keelboat borrowed from Daniel Whitney to Whitney's rapids, across from the present Nekoosa. They arrived on June 2, 1837. Before winter, Wakely built a tavern at the place called Point Basse, south of Whitney's mill on an Indian river crossing at the northern reach of navigable water on the Wisconsin. The same year, daughter Martha was born; she was Wakely's third child and the first born at Point Basse.

Wakely temporarily left his tavern and trading post and followed the river north to Wausau and Merrill with George Kline of Grand Rapids. In 1839, he went to St. Louis with lumber from Whitney's mill where he met George Stevens, a fellow New Yorker. Wakely told Stevens about the pines and water power "up north" and that excited Stevens, so he came up to the land that would bear his name—Stevens Point.

In 1840, Wakely signed a petition asking for the establishment of a mail route into the pinery.

Another white child was born nearby in 1841, Henry Sampson, son of A.B. Sampson. A somewhat drunken celebration was held at Wakely's, lasting five days.

The territorial census of 1842 mentions Robert Wakely by name and indicates that in his household were seven males and three females.

During the Mexican war of that time, the Whitney mill experienced a boom although several workers had enlisted. Others came to take their place, including Ira Purdy, a millwright from New York state, who put up at Wakely's tavern and at once found work building wing dams.

In 1844, according to Portage County records, Francis La Mere mortgaged several oxen to Wakely pending payment of a promissory note of \$63.87 and a "book account" of \$5.48.

From its establishment in January 1845 until its closure in January 1850, Robert Wakely served as the only postmaster of the post office at Point Basse.

Capt. Joseph Cotey of Grand Rapids described a trip along the river made in 1846. "The next station was Robert Wakely's place at Point Basse," he said. "He also kept the 'Devil's Eye

Water,' and a general good time was had."

According to Malcolm Rosholt, the Rev. Cutting Marsh ran into Wakely in Portage in 1849. He said Wakely's face was red and bloated and that he used profane language, apparently because he had taken one too many for the road when he appeared at worship services that evening. "Oh! What a life," wrote Marsh, "to live to have no reference to that what is to come."

The 1850 federal census lists 42-year-old Robert Wakely as a lumberman owning a sawmill, logs and property valued at \$3,000. His family consisted of his wife, Mary, 38, and children Chauncy, Martha, Mary, Otis, Wm. L., Newbald and Alice, ranging in age from 19 to 1. Also in the household were two women and 10 men, probably household help and pinery boys.

In the 1851 supplement to the 1839 land survey, Erskine Stansbury observed a road from "Pt. du Bois" to Portage and a creek 10 links wide "with a sluggish current." He also named separately, although perhaps redundantly, Wakely's house and barn, Wakely's tavern and a warehouse.

Stansbury said there was but a single house at "Pt. Bausse," which he called "A noted place for refitting rafts after passing the rapids, before their final departure for the Mississippi." An accompanying map shows Wakely's "tavern" just north of the mid-section line and a "warehouse" south of that line in the position the house now occupies."

In 1854, wrote Judge Cate of Stevens Point, Wakely, red-eyed again, rode his horse into the Portage County courtroom and doffed his hat to judge David Irvin, singing, "Hush my baby, lie still and slumber."

Despite such displays, Judge Cate said Wakely was "a man of high social qualities, whose good nature never forsook him even when drunk."

Leonard Christian, born in the Wakely house to Wakely's daughter, Alice, provided in 1965 information about the place.

He said that Indians driving ponies down the sand hill blocked the creek and turned it toward the river, an assertion substantiated by map comparisons. Indians played and sometimes fought to the death on the hill where Alice had seen them buried. Some of the conflict may have been due to whiskey sold by Wakely.

Wakely also dealt in another explosive, gunpowder, made in a pit south of the house.



Wakely House (1929?)

Christian said houses didn't cost much to build in the old days. Lumber from broken rafts was simply fished out of the river. He described buildings on the side and top of the hill, both belonging to Wakely.

A large addition had been attached to the old house but was "torn down many years ago by my second cousins."

Mrs. Mary Wakely died at home on Dec. 24, 1887, the same year, according to Newbold Wakely, that the large tavern on the old farm burned. Her obituary states that she was the first white woman to settle in this part of the country.

The writer said that Mr. Wakely had built a hotel and several stores "with the expectation that Nekoosha (Point Basse) would eventually become a town of importance. Later, the village of Grand Rapids became the most important trading point on the upper Wisconsin and the village of Nekoosha now only stands as an old landmark of former days."

Mr. Wakely, continued the account, stayed on his farm the entire time, "with wife sharing the fatigues and hardships of a pioneer's existence.

Mrs. Wakely's hospitality and kindness were proverbial and many parties from the neighborhood were often wont to congregate at the old hostelry."

Wakely died in the house on Feb. 18, 1893, apparently after some years in the care of his daughter, Alice Christian. His obituary said Wakely had arrived in 1837 and for a time worked in the Whitney mill. "Later he entered upon a homestead tract, which he owned until his death."

Point Basse was dead too. According to George N. Wood, the failure of the Nekoosa Lumber Co. about 1860 to develop the water power sealed the village's fate. The leading store building was torn down, made into a raft and run down the river to Lone Rock where it was made into a hotel.

Now on the vacated but verdant riverbank stands a house alone, a record without words suggesting events such as those recorded above. It is rooms and walls in which we listen for the footfalls of ghosts wearing shoes older than our own.

Granma

"Dear Children, Doc and Mary," began the letter from Mary's father to the Garrett "Doc" Cowan family, addressed from "Port Edwards, Wood County, Wis." on Dec. 28, 1887.

Granma has passed away. She died the night of Dec. 24th at 5 minutes past 5 o'clock. She could talk up until within about 2 hours of her death. She spoke of you all often. Would like to see you but as she couldn't, she hoped we would all meet in a better world.

At her arrival on the riverbank land, Granma was the first white woman to settle in Wood County. Now, on this snowy Christmas 75 years after her 1812 birth, Granma was dead.

I bought her a nice lot in the cemetery in Grand Rapids & a casket that cost \$26.50. The shroud cost \$6.00 that Ella and Alice bought. The flowers to lay on her breast Alice bought. Mr. Wm Brown took charge of the funeral.

Years ago, Granma's husband had a vision for his part of the Pinery. He dreamed that he would build a grand and commodious inn that people from all places and all stations in life would visit: wayfarers, wise men and merchants alike.

The pall bearers were Mr. Rablin, Mr. Robert & Mohny Farish, Mr. Joe Wittny, Joe Freeman and Wm Brown. The lot cost 15 Dol. Dan, Ella, Otis & Susan, Newey & Adoline were all here when she died. Charley & Alice were in the woods for Mr. Corkran about 18 or 20 miles away. They were not here when she died.

For a while, the dreams of Granma's husband came true. He built a large inn besides other buildings. And the travelers came.

We buried her Decm. 27. The funeral services were held in the Congregational Church at 2 o'clock p.m. There was a nice crowd for all it was a cold day. About 2 hundred of the townspeople had gone to Vesper with the school children on a party.

But the wonderful town he envisioned on the bank of the dark river in the great pinery didn't quite come to life. A small village clustered around the inn for a time before the few

buildings disappeared one by one. Standing virtually alone, the inn was kept ready. The much smaller house they lived in remained busy.

The hearse met us at the church. It was to meet us on the nearby hill but we got in three quarters of an hour ahead of time. We had to wait at the church for the music. I wanted the hearse to come down to the house. He couldn't on account of it being mounted on wheels. The snow was too deep.

Her hospitality and kindness were proverbial. Many parties from the neighborhood often congregated at the old inn where the young and old would have a joyous time, always made to feel at home.

It nearly wore me out being up so much night and day. Granma couldn't bear to have me out of her sight a minute.

Granma's husband himself was four years older than she. They had been married 57 years.

She had to be helped up every hour and sometimes oftener. She got so she shouldn't lay but a few minutes at a time without being turned over & she couldn't help herself the last few weeks at all.

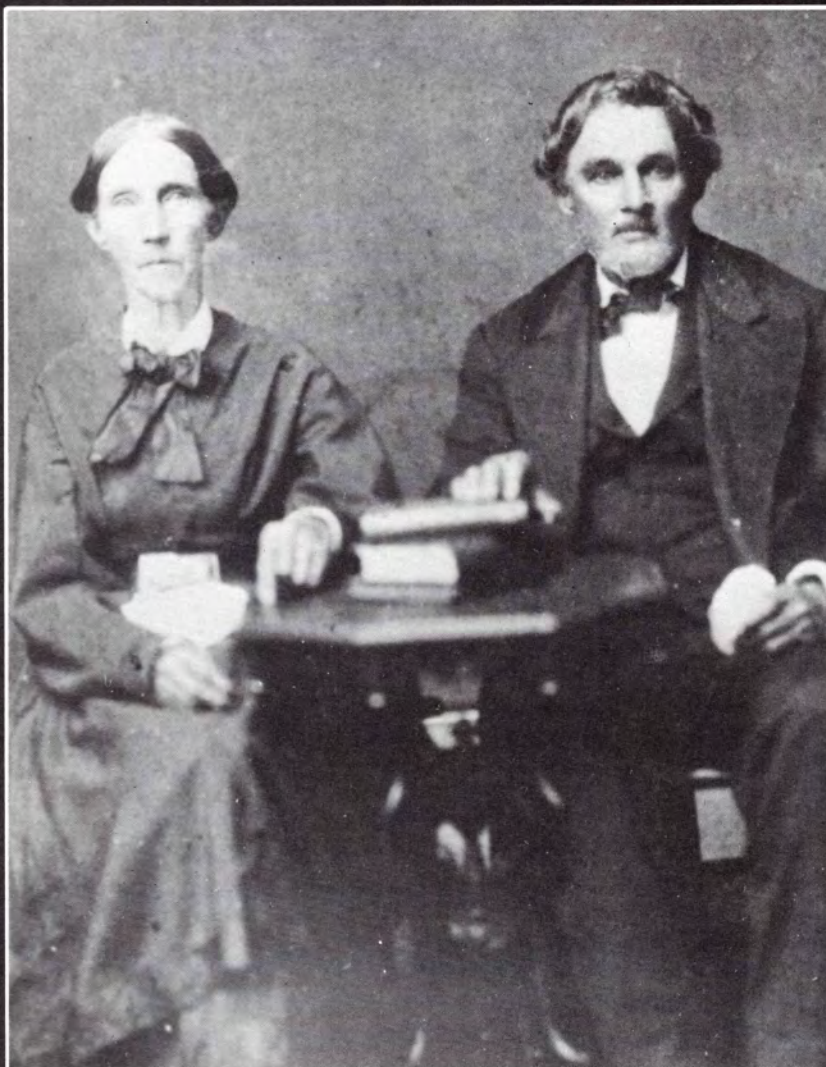
Mary O'Dell, born in New York state, married in Genessee County, 1830, lived five years there, moved to Ohio for two, then by boat down the Ohio.

We have 15 to 20 inches of snow, enough to make good logging. River closed in 2 nights the last of November.

Then up the Mississippi and Wisconsin to Portage, where she and her husband built a keel boat and poled further up the river to the point below the chain of rapids, arriving June 2, 1837.

The folks are all well as usual, with the exception of Charly Christian's children. They all have had the scarlet fever. The most of them are bad yet.

The inn? After seasons of vacancy, it burned the year Granma died, 1887. Her husband would have to walk the grounds of his dream city alone.



Grandma & Granpa

*I would like very much to see
you & hoping this finds you all
well will close. Please write as
soon as you get this. From
your father . . .*

Robert Wakely

Swallow Rock

A chronology shows that "Nekoosa" means more than papermakers. "Swallow Rock" is at once the oldest and the newest river site of south Wood County.

1661: Father Menard, a French Jesuit descends the Wisconsin River by canoe to Swallow rock, a sandstone cliff on the east bank. He attempts to portage from the Swallow Rock Indian village to the Black River but apparently never makes it past the bogs west of the river. He is not seen again.

1767: Jonathan Carver, an English adventurer, is the second white man to mention Swallow Rock in his reports. Carver describes a mile of ruined breastworks flanking the east bank. He identifies them as the work of Vauban, a French military leader.

1827: Lewis Cass, governor of Michigan Territory (and Swallow Rock) paddles upriver to Swallow Rock, then a Chippewa settlement. He counts five swift rapids in the river and many natural mill races. When he returns to Green Bay, he so informs Daniel Whitney, an ambitious capitalist.

1827: Whitney obtains a permit from the Winnebagos to make shingles on the Wisconsin and employs 22 Stockbridge with his nephew David Whitney as superintendent. At the mouth of the Yellow River, they make 200,000 shingles which are confiscated by Major Twiggs, commanding officer at Ft. Winnebago.

1829: Mr. and Mrs. Amable Grignon locate their trading post at Grignon Bend, miles below Swallow Rock. When floods wash their home away, they move upstream.

1831: Whitney builds, near Swallow Rock, the first sawmill on the Wisconsin River. It is run by David Whitney and A.B. Sampson. Whitney also builds the first house in the area, a combination trading post, inn and personal residence.

1836: A treaty with the Menominee opens a strip of land three miles wide on each side of the river to exploitation. Two mills are built at the Grand Rapids and one at Grignon's Rapids, two miles north of Swallow Rock.

1837: Robert and Mary Wakely arrive from New York. They build an inn on the east bank of the river down-

stream from Whitney's mill. The place is crowded every spring with travelers from the East.

1840: Joshua Hathaway has township lines surveyed so that the Menominee cession can be sold in parcels by the U.S. government. A town is projected on the east bank, near Swallow Rock. Letters of this year refer to Outagamie and Chippewa encamped along the marshy western bank, trapping beaver and picking berries.

1842: Henry Sampson, the first white child in the area is born. A big party is held at Wakely's.

1853: Whitney sells Moses Strong of Mineral Point half interest in Whitney's mill.

1857: Albert G. Ellis writes in the Hand-Book of Stevens Point and the Upper Wisconsin that several small steamboats have ascended to Swallow Rock and "Point Bas," "at the head of slack water below a great chain of rapids at what is called the head of navigation." He says Point Bas has but a small population but "will lay undoubted claims to one of the best Town Sites on the River."

1858: Strong sells his property to the Nekoosa Lumber Co. for \$40,000. They build a dam across the river but high water takes it out before a mill can be erected. A second dam is built.

1861: The Nekoosa Lumber Co. goes bankrupt due to losses stated above, economic uncertainties of the Civil War period, the high price of standing timber, lack of cheap labor and the tendency of newcomers to supply their own lumber. Point Basse becomes a ghost town, Whitney's mill is demolished and Wakely's tavern does little business.

1870: The Wood family begins a cranberry marsh on the west side among numerous beaver lodges. "Nearly all the land in the extensive wood yard of the Paper company and west of the Lutheran church was where we picked our cranberries," wrote Wood later.

1872: The Green Bay and Lake Pepin railroad enters Grand Rapids.

1873: The Wisconsin Valley railroad reaches Grand Rapids. The leading store at Point Basse is torn down, made into a raft and floated down to Lone Rock.

1887: George Wood and his brother Frank buy the Strong property for \$4,500.

1888: Thomas E. Nash of Centralia land buys the Wood lands in the Swallow Rock and Point Basse vicinity for \$8,000. Known by the Indian name for running water, "Nekoosa" will now achieve a more concrete destiny.

Nekoosa

"We shall decline to join you in the development of the waterpower," wrote Frederic Joy in 1889 from Detroit. Tom Nash had failed.

"We shall not attempt to build any more pulp mills at present anywhere," said J.A. Kimberly, president of Kimberly Clark Co., Neenah, in 1891, "trusting that you may strike some good fellow to go in and make a fortune with you."

Tom Nash had failed again.

But he was soon to succeed—by finding "some good fellows" to invest in his Nekoosa paper mill project. The benefactors were L.M. Alexander, Port Edwards, A.W. Patten and Patten's son-in-law, John McNaughten, of Appleton, and Nash's old friend, William F. Vilas, in 1892 a U.S. senator.

On Dec. 15, 1892, Nash was able to write to Vilas (in letters now at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison): "The Nekoosa enterprise goes along smoothly and everything seems to be settled except to have the title examined and get an estimate of the cost . . . At the request of Mr. Patten, Moses Hooper of Oshkosh is to investigate the ownership, and has promised to give his opinion by the 22nd and Mr. Tower will give an approximate estimate on the cost of the dam, pulp mill, boiler house and a two machine paper mill not later than the 28th."

L.M. Alexander, president of the John Edwards Manufacturing Co., Port Edwards, wrote to Vilas on Dec. 16, 1892. "We had a meeting with Mr. Tower, paper mill architect and hydraulic engineer, of whom you no doubt have heard Mr. Nash speak of as having once made a survey of his water power some time ago. The meeting was held in Appleton with Mr. Patten and Mr. McNaughten present."

"There is no doubt," concluded Alexander, "that our powers will all be utilized shortly for such purposes and paper mill men say that 'Nekoosa' is bound to be a valuable power for its size and possibility of extensive development."

Tower drew up his plans for inspection by G.F. Steele, general manager of the Combined Locks mill at the time of its completion. The cost would be \$400,000. Nash wrote to Vilas on Jan. 14, 1893, that Steele, Garrison, Patten and McNaughten "dissected" Tower's plan and decided that a dam, pulp mill, boiler house and two-machine paper mill could be built for \$300,000, plus \$50,000 for the Nash-owned property.

Toward the new company Vilas and Alexander committed \$50,000 each, Patten and McNaughten together \$125,000 and Frank Garrison of the Centralia paper mill split \$50,000 with Steele. Nash's assets were valued at \$75,000. Patten was offered the presidency but declined as did McNaughten, in favor of Nash. Garrison became vice president and Alexander secretary-treasurer. Patten and McNaughten joined the board of directors.

On Jan. 19, 1893, Vilas told Nash that he was willing to abide by the judgment of the others more experienced in paper industry but that, "I should discount you a little now, because I think you ought to be naturally zealous for this enterprise." Vilas authorized Nash to go ahead and represent him but there was a problem. "You do not give me the name of the company, and I cannot very well write a proxy without it."

Had the Madison dignitary picked up either River City newspaper, he would have been informed by the largest headlines that day.

"NEKOOSA," proclaimed the Jan. 19, 1893, Wood County Reporter, "The Most Valuable Water Power on The Wisconsin River to be Improved by a Wealthy Corporation."

"NEKOOSA!" celebrated the Centralia Enterprise and Tribune, "The Future Rival of the Twin Cities in Commercial Importance. HALF A MILLION To be Expended in the Development of a Mammoth Manufacturing Center only Eight Miles South of this City."



Nekoosa Mill, 1898

“Tom Nash as great as Diana of the Ephesians in the Estimation of our Citizens for his untiring and ultimately successful efforts in securing the Great Accession to the Paper Making Industry of the Wisconsin River Valley.”

According to the Reporter, nine miles south of the twin cities of Grand Rapids and Centralia was one of the best water powers on the Wisconsin, yet “unimproved” because of the great capital needed. Now a corporation of wealthy men had been organized.

The “water power” embraced land on both banks of the river for a distance of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles, adjoining at the north the John Edwards Manufacturing Co.’s property and to the south the last rapids on the river, known as Wakely’s. The descent of the 600- to 800-foot-wide river was 23 feet with 6,000 to 8,000 potential horsepower between banks 30 to 70 feet high.

The latest owners had multiplied the value of the land while in their domain. Moses Strong of Mineral Point had held it for 30 years, selling to F.J. Wood in 1887 for \$4,500 who turned it over to Nash the following year for \$8,000. For the same property, Nash claimed \$50,000 worth of Nekoosa Paper Co. stock.

With the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul and Port Edwards, Centralia & Northern railroads nearby, the Reporter believed prospects were good. “They will have an outlet to any part of the world.”

The improvement of the property, said the newspaper, meant the inception of quite a promising village. The surrounding territory was already well settled and promised to become a great potato-growing center. With an eye to the future, the Reporter said, “May Nekoosa prove to be a southern suburb that we can all be proud of.”

When the Centralia Enterprise and Tribune published their account of the Nekoosa Paper Co. project, they were no less ebullient than the rival Wood County Reporter. "Once the wheels are set in motion," wrote the Enterprise, "the return for labor and capital expended will be beyond per adventure."

The Enterprise examined the members of the "syndicate of capitalists" who had brought their resources to Nekoosa. Messrs. A.W. Patten and John McNaughten of Appleton were pulp and paper manufacturers in the Fox River Valley. Their company owned two paper mills at Appleton and two at Kaukauna plus numerous pulp mills along the valley. Frank Garrison and G.F. Steele were both "extensively interested" in the Centralia Pulp and Water Power Co. "and as stockholders therein are the pioneers in paper making on the Wisconsin river."

L.M. Alexander deserved a large degree of credit. "Although he has been a resident here only about four years, he attests the faith that is in him concerning our future welfare by investing his money here at home unsparingly, as well as exerting his influence toward others to do likewise."

Thos. E. Nash engineered the project, keeping the "advantages" of the Wisconsin River water power constantly before the large manufacturing interests of the eastern part of the state. "He knows that the waters of the Wisconsin river are soft, are free from lime, and combine the best elements for the successful manufacture of paper."

"Let the citizens of these cities therefore do everything in their power to hold up the hands of these men in their laudable efforts to increase our wealth and enhance our prosperity," urged the Enterprise.

On Jan. 24, Nash sent to Vilas the latter's subscription for 500 shares of Nekoosa stock at \$100 each. He said, "I am going to build a splendid mill—cheap. Messrs. Patten and Garrison will be of great help in selecting plans letting contacts for machinery, water wheels and boilers and I am confident when the plant is completed, the stockholders will be well pleased with their investment and my care."

"You have a great work on hand for the

coming year, and it will require a very constant attention and energy," returned Vilas, "but I am sure you will justify all expectations."

On Feb. 14, Nash used his new Nekoosa Paper Co. stationery to write that preliminary estimates and drawings for the dam and buildings had been examined, changed and agreed upon. His own salary had been set at \$1,800. "We will have the most compact and complete paper making plant in the state—modern in every detail—for less money than plants of 25 percent less capacity," boasted Nash.

Alexander confirmed the hope to Vilas. "Friend Nash is 'hustling hard' in his new duties and I think it will not be long until he will have each item of work well in hand."

Nash reported to Vilas on May 9, 1893. "We commenced excavating for the paper mill yesterday and will be ready to lay stone as soon as they can be got in on cars. Have contracted for stone, brick, lime, cement, timber for the dam, water-wheels, pulp grinders, and one paper machine and shall probably close for the other and water filters in a day or two." Nash explained that he had purchased for \$19,400 a slightly-used 106-inch machine then on display at the Chicago Columbian Exposition and made by the Beloit Iron Works. The other machine, 114 inches, was expected to be provided by Rice, Barton & Fales of Worcester, Mass., as their bid of \$14,000 was considered low.

That price rose quickly. "I went to Appleton Monday and we closed contract for the wide machine," wrote Nash. "Mr. Patten had the specifications changed so it will cost us \$24,350. It is going to be perfect."

On May 29, Nash observed the work at Nekoosa "going forward at a good rate. The track will be in by Wednesday evening and I hope by a week from today to begin laying stone for the chimney and boiler house foundations."

Indeed, the work went well. The first annual report to the stockholders included all transactions from the organization of the company in January of 1893 to Jan. 10, 1894.

The company, said the report, was organized with a capital of \$350,000, \$300,000 in



#2 Paper Machine, 1900

cash by assessment and \$50,000 for the water power and 915 acres of land to which 40 acres were added.

The first work done was to survey and clear a town site. Next, negotiations provided for a connection with the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad with guaranteed "Centralia rates" including \$3 per car on building stone from the Worden quarries in the township of Rudolph. As soon as the ground would permit, excavation began for the boiler house, smoke stack, beater room, machine room and finishing room. Moved were 14,886.9 cubic yards of sand and 1,771 yards of "sand rock." More was dug for wheel pits and tail race.

Permission was granted by the John Edwards Manufacturing Co. and Mrs. W.L. Wood to get rock from their Worden quarries

at 50 cents per cord royalty. A contract was let to Lindahl, Moberg and Hanson for quarrying, hauling and loading at \$3.50 per cord for 3,136.8 cords. August Mante's company of Kaukauna laid 1,211,500 brick made at Watertown. Timber and lumber for buildings and flumes amounted to 77,204 feet. In addition, 109,973 pounds of structural steel were used and 60,073 pounds of rack strips.

Besides the two paper machines, water wheels from Ohio, grinders from Vermont, and boilers from Oshkosh were purchased. A telephone line was installed from Centralia. The cost of items large and small amounted to \$253,617.98.

With so much invested by a capable conglomerate of "good fellows," the making of fortunes could begin at the rapids called Nekoosa.

In 1893, when Thomas E. Nash transferred his property to the Nekoosa Paper Co. for \$50,000 in capital stock, not an acre of ground had been improved nor had a structure been built on the west side of the river between Moccasin Creek and the Manz farm at the lower ferry across from Wakely's. The only reason a town was necessary was the paper mill project.

Nash involved himself directly with the planning of the town as he wrote to William F. Vilas, an investor. "We will want a post office early in spring and a daily mail from Port Edwards. Two stores are about assured and one of them if built as now proposed will be very nicely arranged for a post office. The fellow is a Democrat too."

In company with George N. Wood, who developed much of the Nekoosa area, a *Centralia Enterprise* reporter visited on March 21, 1893. "Of course the town site at present is in its primitive state all covered with trees, brush &c." The *Enterprise* found a crew of eight men living in a shanty while they worked on a boarding house and hotel. Fred Davis had material on the ground for a store. Wood himself had a 360-acre farm on which one building had nearly been completed. This, wrote the *Enterprise*, would be occupied the following Friday by Mr. Joseph Balderstone, Wood's nephew. That made him the first settler of Nekoosa.

"To reach the town site where the building is now being done we had to drive off the main road about 100 rods right through the brush over a road in its natural state well calculated to settle one's dinner," comments the newspaper.

Three weeks later, the *Enterprise* observed major changes. The boarding house previously promised had been completed and occupied. The "company" had an 18- by 30-foot office almost ready for occupancy. Ed Davis was building a store, George Conely a hotel for Mr. Burns, Mose Marceau a saloon, Frank Brown a dwelling house and Mr. Brower a boarding house. "Surveyors have been on these grounds for the past two weeks and they have the new village of Nekoosa platted. Streets are laid out and some of them are already cleared of brush, trees, &c. The

main thoroughfare is 90 feet wide upon which all the business blocks face."

L.M. Alexander, president of the John Edwards Manufacturing Co. of Port Edwards, wrote on April 21, 1893, to Vilas. "Stores, dwellings, boarding houses and a hotel are rapidly going up by private enterprise. Mr. Patten spoke of building a \$5,000 church this summer and donating it to some society and we are proposing to build a nice school site. A very nice town site is laid out and streets are being opened up. A large part of the work on the plans for mills and machinery have been decided upon and part of the machinery bought. We hope to have a very good showing when you come up."

On May 8, Nash wrote to the surveyor of the plat to explain a small faux pas. "I had forgotten about the names for the streets, but will enclose diagram showing the names we have decided upon." The resulting noms de thoroughfare honor the investors in the Nekoosa Paper Co.: Vilas, Patten, Alexander and Garrison.

The Wood County Reporter inventoried Nekoosa on May 11. "This suburb to the twin cities is rapidly building up and each visit we make marks many improvements." Mentioned first was clearing right of way for the C.M. & St. Paul railroad.

The telephone line was in and the company's office established. Several buildings were on the way to completion: Alfred Menier's saloon and boarding house, Mike Max-tract's saloon and boarding house, James Keenan's grocery store and Chas. W. Christian's restaurant.

On June 17, the *Enterprise* reported that a stage line run by Messrs. Boggs and Forbush had been inaugurated between Centralia and Nekoosa.

The *Enterprise* commented on July 15. "Nekoosa is flourishing like a Green Bay tree. On the day of our visit, one hundred forty-six men were employed by the Nekoosa Paper Co. in building their dam and getting the construction of their mammoth pulp and paper mill under headway." The foundation for the new Congregational church had been nearly completed and former county clerk, Mr. William Hooper, now Nekoosa



Nekoosa

postmaster, had enjoyed a good run of business, "which he hopes to materially increase as soon as he moves into his new store."

On Aug. 31, the Reporter noted three new stores and 10 new residences. The church was nearly complete. Hooper's new store proved to be "a very suitable place for William if he ever had courage enough to wed some handsome young lady."

Another writer from the Enterprise visited "Nekoosa" for the first time on Sept. 6. "A year ago where now the bustling little village is located, we enjoyed a pleasant afternoon's picnic amidst the solitudes of the forest. Now about twenty or twenty-five buildings—business houses and residences—form the nucleus of what will shortly be a thriving little town."

Nash's letter of the previous May 9 to

Vilas about what the "History of Wood County" called his "pet and pride, to which he contributed practically the sum of a human life to establish" forecasts the almost instant community. "I have been wanting to write you of Nekoosa for a week but don't know where to begin . . . there's a hotel, two boarding houses, three saloons, two stores and four or five residences well under way and three stores and at least ten residences to be built as soon as the RR is completed which will be about June 1st. There's a meat market under way. We have an office, a blacksmith shop and a tool house and are going to put up a lime and cement house this week.

Each day is changing it so much that if I told you of half the work that is under way or arranged for, you would look upon it as a fairy tale."

Grand Rapids Street Railroad

It is said that even non-users of the Grand Rapids Street Roadroad appreciated its services when Father Feldman of Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Nekoosa droned on too long with his sermon.

The blast of an air horn at 8:40 a.m. followed by several clangs of the trolley bell told the congregation and Father Feldman that the southbound car was in. The sermon had to be completed so that worshippers from Port Edwards could catch the 9 a.m. trip back.

When Nekoosa was founded in 1893, the road to Rapids proved none too smooth. Until 1909, travelers had to take a horse or walk. In 1910, travelers got aboard the modern age by way of that most electric of motivational phenomena, the street car. Energized by a power line above and riding on a rail below, this new means of transportation brought together two decades of passengers.

On March 27, 1909, a group of businessmen in Grand Rapids organized the Grand Rapids Street Railroad Co. to build a trolley line to Nekoosa. Officers were Neal Brown, president; L.M. Nash, vice president; G.M. Hill, secretary; F.J. Wood, treasurer; B.F. Wilson, M.C. Ewing and G.D. Jones, directors. Laying of rail was completed Jan. 11, 1910. Service started the same day. The basic route began at Market Street in Nekoosa and followed along the Wisconsin River to Port Edwards and up to Grand Rapids. There, the tracks took 3rd Avenue to Grand Avenue and turned toward the last stop at the west end of the Grand Avenue Bridge.

Cars left Nekoosa and Grand Rapids each hour. The first car to reach the "passing track" north of Port Edwards sidetracked to allow the opposite-bound car to pass. Only two cars were used with two motorless trailers available for rush hours.

In the year of construction, in order to provide a destination for potential customers, the company constructed and operated the Moccasin Creek Pavilion, overlooking the Wisconsin River just north of the creek

between Nekoosa and Port Edwards. Special cars made trips to the pavilion from both ends of the line. The pavilion became a popular spot for dancing, picnics and church socials. On dance nights, the street-car line provided "doubleheader" service to handle the crowds.

Extra service was also required for athletic contests such as the big Nekoosa-Rapids games, home talent plays and Sunday afternoon baseball games in summer at the Rapids South Side Park adjacent to the line. Stable ridership was provided by workmen en route to mills at Nekoosa, Port Edwards and Rapids.

Business prospered. In the first year, the cars carried 128,065 paying passengers and 2,453 free riders gaining a revenue of \$10,477. The figures grew until the peak year of 1919, when 581,979 paying passengers were carried and 3,650 rode free. Passenger income that year totaled \$49,891.

With the construction of the Grand Avenue Bridge in 1922, the rails were extended across to the East Side at Vine (Grand) and 2nd streets. The addition of any east siders with pedestrian bridgephobia couldn't save what was now named the Wisconsin Rapids Street Railroad. After the end of World War I, automobiles came into general use and most street-car businesses declined. In 1920 here, 437,582 paid to ride 104,657 car miles. In 1925, 270,780 paid to ride 93,956 miles. With fewer and fewer riders, the miles got expensive. The company could not longer cover costs and, in fact, began to lose money in 1930.

The next year, 1931, the directors voted to abandon the line.

On June 9, 1931, the Wisconsin Rapids Tribune said it was sorry to see the abandonment. "Street cars seemed to differentiate between the country village and the enterprising small city, and Wisconsin Rapids will lose something of its metropolitan air when the clank and clatter is gone. We wish the venture could have continued self-supporting."



It was a trend, said the Tribune. Street-car lines with their expensive equipment could no longer compete with buses. In fact, on July 19, 1931, during the same hearing at which L.M. Nash applied for abandonment of the street-car line, John Schenk applied for a permit to begin a bus line. That, in turn was opposed by the local Yellow Cab company, represented by attorney Herbert A. Bunde.

On Aug. 4, a franchise had been granted to Schenk and denied the Yellow Cab company to operate a bus line on the same route. The bus line no longer exists.

The street cars and equipment were almost immediately sold.

The right of way between Port Edwards and "Nekoosa Junction" was acquired by Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. to be used as

an inter-mill line.

Many of the rails remained undisturbed until World War II, when they were torn out and turned in as scrap metal to aid the war effort.

A car barn on 2nd Avenue South between Boles and Woodbine streets was razed in 1959. It had been turned over to the city under an arrangement that had the city agree to take out tracks and other installations.

When the Moccasin Creek Pavilion was dismantled round 1929, salvaged beams were sold to Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Now without street-car alarm to summon them, the congregation of the new church could be subjected to that unique anguish, a sermon with no predestined end.



Shortly after he had retired for the night, Tom Nash heard a sound that brought him sharply awake. It was a strange crackling noise from somewhere outside his room.

Nash had spent Monday evening, Dec. 2, 1901, with his son, Guy, in the offices of their Northern Paper Co. Reaching home at 10:45 p.m., the two sat up a few minutes watching the new passenger train cross the Northwestern bridge just downstream from their west river bank home.

Noting that the train was late, Nash went to bed. In a few minutes, troubled by what he heard, Nash got up and went to his wife's bedroom in the house they had shared for 20 years. Finding nothing out of order there, he went to the rear of the "old house" to look through the window at the empty mansion into which he hoped to move his family by Christmas.

For the 49-year-old son of Irish immigrants of modest means, this was a considerable estate, made possible by the sale of water-power rights at the "Grand Rapids" to Nels Johnson and J.D. Witter the previous March. The \$35,000 would almost pay for the home,

one of the most majestic in northern Wisconsin.

The house, designed by Ferry and Clas of Milwaukee, was to have over 20 usable rooms, including two floors for general living and a third with a ballroom. Only the choicest woods and fittings had been used and every modern convenience was provided. Construction had been on the fire-proof plan, using brick and steel for the exterior walls. All the interior woodwork had been finished and the painters were closing up their work. In a few days, the move would be made.

But what was wrong?

Looking across the yard, Nash could see the electric lights burning, as they should be. Every precaution, he felt, had been taken to ensure that nothing damaging should occur. Waste and debris had been removed immediately from every room as a precaution against fire.

Nash turned toward his bedroom when the ominous crackling sounded again. This time he decided a thorough investigation was necessary. Slipping on his clothes, he stepped out into the stinging cold between the old house and the

Restoring the Mansion



new house.

Now he could see something desperate was indeed amiss. The northeast corner of his dream was aflame. He called for help.

The East Side fire department responded immediately. However, by the time it found a place on the steep bank of the river to park the steamer, the water in it had got so low that it had to be taken back to the engine house to be refilled. In the meantime, the West Side company was slow to assemble. When it did get its wagon out, there was no team to haul it. The wagon had to be hauled half way to the fire by hand before a team could be secured. It took 45 minutes to get water on the flames, a measure that subdued them momentarily. Soon after 1 p.m., the flames burst forth again from every aperture. The roof and supports were so burned that everything but the walls fell in a heap of ruins.

The final outbreak of the fire was caused by the failure of the West Side waterworks, leaving the firemen temporarily without water of any kind. It seems the chimney had plugged with soot at the pumping station and the stack heated red hot so

the engineer shut down the pumps.

Attempting to deal with such exigencies, the two companies worked until 8 a.m., keeping a stream playing on the smoking ruins until the last vestige of fire extinguished. Only the great walls stood—roofless in the December dawn.

Nash said insurance would cover \$9,000 of the total loss of \$18,000.

How the fire originated, he could not ascertain. Nash didn't believe the source was the furnace, which was placed in fireproof surroundings. Perhaps a workman threw a match into a corner or emptied coals from a pipe somewhere to smolder and ignite later. Or some oily rags thrown in a pile in the basement incited spontaneous combustion. Though he was greatly disappointed by the frustration of Christmas plans, Nash immediately set about having the work restored.

Alfred C. Clas of the architectural firm arrived in Grand Rapids on Wednesday. Yes, he said, it could be rebuilt. The walls had stood the fire in remarkably good shape, probably due to the steel lath used.

In the original grand man-

ner, Nash put it all back together. He had promoted the use of hardwoods and now his friends in that industry replaced the wood from their original orders.

By 1902, Nash's own health had begun to decline, due to the progressive disease from which he suffered. His later years were spent as an invalid, enjoying at least the prized view of the Wisconsin River islands outside his rebuilt creation.

After Nash's 1917 death, his wife, Ella, continued to live in the house until her death in August 1926. The following month, the place was sold by the Nash heirs to the president of the company Nels Johnson and Jere Witter had formed, Consolidated Water Power and Paper Co.

When Stanton Mead returned from his honeymoon, he would find a suitable wedding present awaiting him; his father, George W. Mead I, had bought him the Nash house.

With the exception of an added sun porch and terrace, Stanton, who lives there now with his second wife, Vi, has preserved the mansion intact, a symbol of what paper had afforded a certain river city.

Plumed Knights

For several days after the big rallies of Sept. 17, 1884, black eyes were the campaign buttons of many political enthusiasts.

The largest political rallies ever held in Wood County had attracted crowds estimated at 7,000 to the downtown areas of Grand Rapids and Centralia. On Wednesday night, supporters of Republican presidential candidates James G. Blaine clashed with the followers of Democrat Grover Cleveland. Also participating in the partisanship were the three local newspapers. The Republican Wood County Reporter promoted Blaine. The Centralia Enterprise and the Grand Rapids Tribune stood by Cleveland and a Democratic ticket that included J.A. Gaynor for district attorney, John Edwards for state senator, and Thomas E. Nash for state assembly.

Although there was sometimes a division among local offices, Wood County was considered generally Democratic. The year 1884 found the Republicans well organized and hopeful. Grand Rapids boasted a large contingent of "Plumed Knights," the party marching club honoring Blaine. A complete county ticket and a number of rallies had been arranged for. The biggest was scheduled for Sept. 17 at which time congressman William T. Price was to make the principal address.

From the choice of the date itself arose the fracas. The rally was to occur during the local fair. Republicans claimed W.T. Jones, treasurer of the agricultural society and a prominent Democrat, had told J.D. Witter, president of the local Blaine club, that the Republicans could name their date first. They chose "soldier's day."

So, however, did the Democrats. Neither would give in.

During the day of the 17th, said the Reporter, a large number of Democrats from Wausau joined those in the twin cities; consequently, the saloons overflowed.

In the evening, the Republicans met in

front of their headquarters on "Main Street" of Grand Rapids and proceeded to the Green Bay depot to meet their guests from Stevens Point and Plover. The train was late. Meanwhile, approximately 500 Democrats formed a line in front of Dalke's saloon and marched with three bands across the bridge into Centralia and back to the courthouse at Grand Rapids. "They paraded and howled to their hearts content undisturbed," wrote the Reporter.

At the courthouse, the Democrats were addressed by John W. Cary of Milwaukee. Also called to speak were James Meehan and John Edwards.

At 8:15, the Blaine group arrived from Stevens Point and Plover and joined their fellow Republicans, "every man sober, clean, well dressed and none boisterous," said the Reporter. With the Point marching band in the fore, they made an impressive spectacle, lights flaring from the tops of their uniform hats, carrying torches and signs. The 216 "Plumed Knights" were led by Capt. Joseph Cotey, R.N. Ragley and H.W. Lord. When the procession reached the post office, it stopped and gave three cheers for Blaine and his vice presidential candidate, John A. Logan and continued down Main Street and across the bridge into Centralia.

At this point, the Democratic crowd in the west yard of the courthouse began cheering and firing off their cannon. According to the Reporter, many Democrats decided the Plumed Knights put on such a fine parade that they wandered off to follow the Republicans, leaving their speaker in the lurch.

After the Knights returned to the Witter House in Grand Rapids and paraded in a circle, J.D. Witter introduced Price from the balcony of the "Central House." The Reporter said Price scored some hard verbal blows that made the rank elements of the Democratic Party squirm under his fire.

The rival Enterprise said Price "made some loud and boisterous remarks calling the Democrats Ku-Kluxes and other pet names, as is his wont whenever he indulges in a political bloody shirt speech." It was true, said the Enterprise, that the Plumed Knights were well uniformed. And why not? "The party to which they belong have been robbing the public for twenty-four years and what we want now is to turn the rascals out and then, may be, the workingmen in our procession can also wear Prussian helmets, sashes, little mantles and 'unicorns' and look pretty."

As Price neared the end of his remarks, the Democratic meeting ended and the whole gang came down to disrupt the Republican meeting, said the Reporter. As the two groups met, the Democrats were accorded a "fair share of the street" while they were greeted with music and applause from the Republicans.

Instead of going about their business as decent orderly citizens, the Democrats managed to get on all sides of the "Blainites" and circled round and round, hooting, yelling, swearing "and making veritable asses of themselves." The villainy of the Democrats was ended only as the Republicans were ordered into line and crowded the "hoodlums and drunken rowdys" off the street.

By contrast, the Grand Rapids Tribune claimed the Plumed Knights halted their forces near the Democrats and attempted to disrupt the gathering by playing the two tunes at once and cheering lustily for their plumed leaders. They refused to let the Democrats pass and forced them into the gutter instead while their band played the "Rogue's March." The Knights, fully armed, called the Cleveland club "stinking democrats" and dared them to go through.

Many Democrats in the line, said the Reporter, were too drunk to walk alone and were bolstered up by their companions.

"Save a few isolated cases, where poor whiskey had gained control," said the Enterprise, "our men behaved well, and as usual,



Tom Nash

the Reporter is way off in its statements."

The Enterprise maintained the Blaine club had come for the purpose of having a row and that before they got to the depot, they were so weak they missed the return train and laid around the depot all night and had to be shipped home the next morning in a box car.

A Republican participant, A.L. Fontaine, of the Reporter, reminisced on Oct. 9, 1928, saying that numerous fist fights occurred between the partisans and that the affair assumed a warlike aspect until the leaders of both sides quelled the near riot allowing Price to resume his speech in which he "dealt the hoodlums more powerful blows."

Until late that night, small bands of partisans roamed the business sections of Grand Rapids and Centralia, undertaking many a "fistic argument." The Republicans, said Fontaine, considered at the time they had the best of it but when election day came, Cleveland carried the county and with him the entire Democratic ticket.

T.E. Nash

Tom Nash knew what to do with the junk timber left after his predecessors had taken the pine out of the pinery. The application of his idea resulted in at least one railroad, two towns, a paper mill, a pulp-buying concern, a bank and a grand mansion along the Wisconsin River. In addition, Nash was involved in one of the largest cranberry marshes of the 19th century, four grist mills and a street-car line. He also helped create several landmarks in the capital city.

Nash rose to this accomplishment from a peasant heritage. His father, Lawrence, was a salmon fisherman from the Irish village of Shanagolden near the river Shannon who immigrated to Boston in 1850 to escape the potato famine.

Thomas, the third child, was born April 4, 1852, at Zanesville, Ohio. The following year, the family moved to Wisconsin, landing eventually in Granville township, Milwaukee County, as Lawrence's employers moved their railroads even farther into the north. Until the age of 14, Tom attended Milwaukee schools. He spent a year working on a farm before, like his father, going to work on the railroad, laboring at construction while studying telegraphy, then a "high tech" field.

From 1866 to 1869, Nash operated a telegraph in Iowa and Minnesota for the Green Bay and Western Railroad. In 1869, he went to Fond du Lac. During the early 1870s, Nash worked at Saukville, Amherst and Shiocton. In 1875, he came to Centralia as station agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul road.

Nash was transferred to Port Ed-

wards and to Remington where, with his brother, Lawrence M., he bought a parcel of land and hired local Winnebagoes to pick cranberries, which were shipped to Chicago.

In 1882 or 1883, Nash was appointed traveling freight agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, but resigned when elected in 1884 to the state Assembly. His service in the Legislature brought Nash into contact with William Vilas, his seatmate and one of the state's most influential citizens.

Vilas immediately engaged Nash to assist him in one of his pet projects, the development of the University of Wisconsin. When Vilas was named postmaster general by President Cleveland in early 1885, the task of shepherding the university appropriation bill through the Assembly was left to Nash. After a substantial reduction, the bill's passage resulted in Science Hall, the "old red gym" and a heating plant.

Vilas soon summoned Nash to Washington as chief clerk of the post office department, appointing him next to the position of general superintendent of the railway mail service in which he continued until 1888 when Nash resigned to return to Wisconsin. That year, he bought from George and Frank Wood the land at Whitney Rapids that would lead to the biggest project of his life.

But first, Nash joined his brother, John L., in purchasing and operating the Neeves flour mill in Grand Rapids (on the site of the present East Side swimming pool). In 1890, he organized, as president and general manager, the Port Edwards, Centralia and Northern

Railway with tracks from Port Edwards to Marshfield. Under his leadership, the Wood County National Bank was founded in 1891.

The cranberry marsh T.E. had bought with brother L.M. in 1875 had become one of the most successful in the area until drainage of bog areas caused drought and fires in 1892 and 1893, and he disposed of it. The last crop of berries brought in just enough cash to capitalize on the land purchase of 1888.

In 1892, with local partners L.M. Alexander, F.J. Wood and Frank Garrison, and out-of-town investors Vilas, A.W. Patten and John McNaughton, Nash brought together the Nekoosa Paper Co. The following year, he built a paper mill using as a central element the paper machine from the Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

In 1900, Nash acquired large timber holdings in Ashland and Sawyer counties, including a mill at Shanagolden, held in the name of the Nash Lumber Co., which was a partnership of T.E., his sons Guy and James, and William Vilas. The 1907 Port Edwards Fibre Co. absorbed those holdings as in 1908 Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. combined the Port Edwards Fibre Co., the John Edwards' paper mill, the Centralia Pulp and Water Power Co. and Nash's Nekoosa Paper Co. in 1908. Nash served as president until 1910 when he resigned due to a debilitating illness that has been diagnosed as "paralysis agitans" or Parkinson's disease.

Had original plans worked out, Nash also would have been a prime mover in the Consolidated Paper Co. Even before 1890, a group of industrialists wanted a dam at the Grand Rapids. Among them were T.E. and L.M. Nash. A memo of agreement was drawn up regarding



T.E. Nash

apportionment of rights according to amount of property and its value. However, the Nash brothers became dissatisfied and, after a court battle with other investors, placed their assets with the Nekoosa project.

The last 15 or so years of Nash's life, despite his tremendous material success, were characterized by his battle with the progressive disease from which he died on Dec. 13, 1917. The funeral was held in the mansion on the west bank of the Wisconsin that seemed to symbolize his success. "He was a man of tremendous vision and enterprise, and his contributions to the industrial advancement of the State were both many and great," wrote the Encyclopedia of Biography (1931). "The value of his accomplishments was not limited to the period of his own life. They have become instead a part of the very fabric of Wisconsin's existence, forming the foundation on which the Commonwealth of today has been built."

Shanagolden

The town Tom Nash built, the town in which young Herbie Bunde enjoyed the numberless days of childhood, the town with the magic name "Shanagolden" is today no more than a country crossroads a few miles southwest of Glidden.

Now a reserve circuit judge, Herbert A. Bunde recently completed his Shanagolden memoirs. Reflective of community life and boyhood enthusiasms there, they depict a typical northwoods sawmill town in its heyday, as seen by a young boy.

Shanagolden consisted of one street along the east bank of the Chippewa River and another street a block back, connected by three or four side streets. Along these streets were some 15 to 20 frame houses. The residents were almost entirely employees of the Nash Lumber Co. and their families, such as Al MacDonald, the locomotive engineer; Jay Kimball, the conductor; Robert Elliot, expert logger; and Charles Bunde, builder of railroads.

Charles Bunde was Herbert's father. Mother was Alvina, who never really called Shanagolden home. Home was always Grand Rapids, where the family had previously lived and to which they intended to return.

The prize residence of Shanagolden was Nash Lumber Co. manager Guy Nash's dark-brown-stained European-style manor in the woods at the north-east edge of the settlement. Bunde visited there a time or two for cookies. Jean Nash was born there.

"Downtown" consisted of a general store and post office to which was attached the lumber company office, a boarding house, a bunkhouse, and, across the street, the community building that later became the town hall.

There was also a two-room schoolhouse. To the south of "downtown" a dirt road led to the dam on the east fork where the lumber mill went full blast from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. with an hour off for noon six days a week. On the east side of the river a railroad ran from Glidden to Shanagolden with branch lines extending west into the forest and the logging camps there.

Each logging camp was a temporary settlement in its own right with bunk houses, horse barns, a camp office and a cook shanty where the cook was king and allowed no one but the privileged foremen, teamsters and train crew to talk.

The horsepower available to the lumber camps and Shanagolden mill was impressive. Before the advent of steam engines in the woods, horses hauled logs to landings next to the railroad and from the rail cars to the mill.

Camp Six was several miles north of Shanagolden and not located on any railroad. Logs cut there had to be taken to the yard by logging sled in very cold weather when the road could be iced. To ice the track, ruts were made by a heavy sleigh and filled with water by the road icer, a large wooden water tank with sprinkling holes over the ruts. For half a mile down a grade on the iced road into the log yard several times a day the pulling team had to go on the run as the teamster with the reins tightly in hand on the high-piled logs shouted at the top of his lungs a warning of his thundering approach.

Bunde enjoyed his early life in Shanagolden even as the happy days were coming to a close. The town had no reason to exist other than the mill. When a summer day in 1908 dawned with the flaming



Shanagolden

mill fire blocking out the morning sun, hapless men stood with water bucket and shovel and watched their workplace burn down to ashes and a brick boiler room. The end had come to the town and they knew it.

For the mill hands there was no more work. There was no more work for the lumberjacks either and the exodus began. For those in town with families who felt the need to stay at least for a while, work had to be found elsewhere.

Charles Bunde eventually went to Foster-Latimer logging company stationed in Mellen, 30 miles north on the Wisconsin Central. Each Sunday afternoon he walked to Glidden and caught the northbound passenger train to Mellen. Each Saturday evening he boarded the southbound at Mellen and rode to Glidden. Then he walked home to Shanagolden glad to have a job.

The next big change came when the Mellen Lumber Co. acquired timber rights to the forests west of Shanagolden. Many former Nash Lumber Co. employees signed on. However, the base for the new operation was not Shanagolden but Glidden; a headquarters, office,

warehouse and roundhouse had been built. Lumber camps in the woods sent their logs by track directly to Glidden where the railroad junctioned with the Wisconsin Central. By the Central they went to other places for processing in mills. Most probably were destined for the newly merged Nekoosa and Port Edwards paper mills.

As all this happened it became apparent that the residents of Shanagolden were living in the wrong place. Rather than try to find housing in the burgeoning burg of Glidden, many decided to move there but take their houses along with them. The first houses were moved by railroad, including the Bunde residence. Other were hauled, over the winter, by sleighs, leaving a town behind mainly of vacant lots.

The Bunde and their neighbors could still sit in the same living rooms but the view out the window had certainly changed. No longer could they look at their beloved pioneer home of a decade or so. They were now citizens of "Glidden," not that mellifluous place of youth and memory, the town called "Shanagolden."

The Lost Marsh

At the Juneau County border lies a square mile of abandoned county land that once contained the cranberry marsh of an absentee landlord of some prominence, Col. William F. Vilas of Madison. Vilas, at one time U.S. senator and also a member of President Cleveland's cabinet, left at his death, Aug. 27, 1908, \$1,828,934.71 in an estate that eventually went to the University of Wisconsin.

Letters now at the State Historical Society, Madison, from Vilas to Thomas E. Nash of Centralia, his cribbage opponent and business partner, demonstrate some of the concerns manifested in the development of one agribusiness here.

On Sept. 22, 1890, Vilas wrote that he had been going over a package of tax certificates and deeds that Nash had sent him but needed a more complete set, lest the holder obstruct the completion of title. "On examination of your plat book, it would appear that the Joy tract of 24 forties in Secs. 32 and 33 may be well utilized independently of the Bissell tract lying north." Vilas contacted the Wood County clerk and obtained in September of 1890 deeds to the land that had gone to the county in 1886 for non-payment of taxes. Vilas wrote, that month, "It will surely be desirable to get the original title before expending much money on the lands, and yet I shall wish to crowd their development as fast as may be feasible . . . You see, I want this so that I can have no hesitation in spending whatever shall be requisite to make a cranberry marsh to rival yours."

Vilas felt he had to clear Bissell's potential claim as previous owner. "We understood the lands were abandoned for taxes and that we could buy them for taxes, with a nominal price for the original title which was worth little or nothing. If, however, Mr. Bissell is not willing to sell on that theory, he must be willing to redeem." In December, Vilas said he hoped to have a survey made while the marshes were frozen but that Bissell still had not freed his land. "By the way," asked Vilas, "where and how do you pay taxes on your marsh?"

It was Feb. 10, 1891, before Vilas actually received for \$350 full title to his marsh from

Roman A. Bissell of Wayne County, Mich., by way of Gardner and Gaynor, local attorneys.

Vilas said he was considering buying those portions of Section 29 that he did not already own. "You know I do not turn back after entering on an undertaking, and I mean to be a good neighbor to you in the cranberry business."

On July 7, Vilas said he was waiting to learn about machine ditching he had apparently contracted. In July, he sent "Henry" to Babcock and expected "Mr. Dickerman" to join Henry to arrange for receiving lumber to be hauled to the marsh for construction of a house and other buildings. "The work on the marsh is getting on rapidly," Vilas wrote on Aug. 2, 1891. "The whole of the west side had been ditched from the county line nearly two miles north and the reservoir dam will soon be constructed. Also drainage ditches forty to eighty rods east of the west line."

"It is very desirable indeed," Vilas added, "that we should get to work on the road from Babcock as soon as possible." Vilas continued to discuss attempting to get the town board to put in a road, also declaring, "I want to go up during the time of cranberry picking, which I think will be peculiarly interesting."

On Aug. 25, he wrote, "I intend to go to the marsh next Monday for a day or two and shall hope to see you, either at Babcock or at your marsh where I suppose you will be engaged in picking what is left of the crop this year."

The town of Port Edwards agreed to build the road but the town of what was then Remington refused even though Vilas offered to bear at least a third of the cost. "The road will be of real value to the Village of Babcock," he argued, "because it will open the country lying east of my land, and parties living there have already begun to move to get the advantage of it."

Winter allowed Vilas plenty of time to worry. "I am a little troubled," he wrote on Feb. 15, 1892, "to know just what is the best way to carry on my operation up there on the marsh. I don't quite like to build a house and have a foreman and let him go on and buy the provisions to maintain a family and hired men at his pleasure. Of course, last year's operations

Hog Island

As Luella Copeland fried up some bacon on the kitchen stove, she heard an awful crash. At first she didn't think too much about it. So many squirrels around the place. Or it could be cats. When she saw a window screen had been pushed in, Mrs. Copeland began to worry. All night long the dogs barked. Dawn revealed the reason for the ruckus. A bear had visited the isolated homestead south of Babcock. The incident might have occurred 100 years ago. It happened last spring.

Mrs. Copeland has lived in various homes in the Babcock country most of her life. Born May 26, 1891, she is 92 or 93 years old, she's not sure which. "I used to live in a little cabin. You could hear the coyotes at night. When we lived on Hog Island, my brother used to go out and find whippoorwill nests all over the ground. There used to be lots and lots of sandhill cranes. And prairie chickens. Come daylight if you lived near a marsh of any kind you could hear them go 'boom boom boo!'"

The nonagenarian's first memory is of a spanking at the hand of her older brother, Howard Teeters. Three-year-old

Luella wanted to go along with Howard and the team he was taking out to do some dragging work. "They had the horses hitched up to one end of the whiffletree and I followed him. He stopped the horses until I caught up. He really blistered me, I'll tell you."

Another early incident involved livestock. The pet mink seized one of the family chickens by the head and wouldn't let go. "My oldest sister got the chicken by the feet," said Mrs. Copeland. "I grabbed the mink. She pulled one way and I pulled the other. My brother came running. When he saw us, he stood laughing. Of course, it killed the chicken."

After some years in Bear Bluff near City Point, the Teeterses moved closer to Babcock. Luella, then 12, saw a big town with five taverns, two grocery stores, a livery stable, a rescue home for unwed mothers and a concentration of large railroad-oriented buildings. Older brother Howard worked in a train coal shed. Her father laid ties. Luella served up the meals at Mr. Stout's hotel (later the Berry Patch tavern). Most of the clientele were such as switchmen, brakemen and gandydancers.

It was best to take the train when possible. The roads through marsh country were often submarine. When Luella's family moved closer to a schoolhouse, the boys had to walk on both sides of the corduroy road to hold the road logs down so the horse could get through the knee-high water. Behind came mama driving the cows and hogs. "We came across one marsh and the horses couldn't follow the road," said Mrs. Copeland. "The wagon was loaded with chickens and bedding stuff. That one horse would give a lunge and get out, then it would go down again and it would give another lunge."

The wild marsh country provided recreation, food and cash for Luella and her family. If she can't hardly look at venison today, it's because deer was the only meat her family ever ate aside from a stray rabbit or two. Ditches along the road to Mather spawned a few fish. Berries, though, were Mrs. Copeland's speciality. With her husband, Raymond, she came down every year even when they lived at Sheldon on the Jump River, Rusk County.

Blueberries? There used to be an awful crop around Babcock. You waded into the marsh carrying two quart pails and carried them out full. At Babcock, Necedah or Finley you did pretty well: 6 cents a quart.

Huckleberries? One year Ray was cutting hay and ran onto a patch of huckleberries; half a pail from one clump. You ate a pie and your lips and everything turned blue-black, just like drinking ink. You never saw such huckleberries.

Raspberries and blackberries also thrived in abundance but cranberries brought in the best cash. From the 8th of September to the 10th of October Luella put a pan in front of her and crawled along on her knees, raking the berries off with her fingers. The ground was mostly dry but once in a while she'd get a wet marsh. The men for the most part raked in water wearing hip boots. Many of the pickers and rakers were Indians who were considered very skilled. In a day, you could pick a bushel, maybe a bushel and a half depending on how the cranberries were. A bushel brought a 75-cent card that could be turned in for cash.

Also good money was trailing arbutus, a big-leaved vine with pink and white flowers. There were oceans of them, said Mrs. Copeland. "When we used to live on Hog Island, us girls wanted a dress for Easter so Ma and my youngest brother

picked arbutus and sold them to get cloth to make our dresses, my sister and I. They carried them to Mather from all around and sold them for 5 cents a bunch."

The delicate and aromatic arbutus have nearly all been harvested now. They belong to the past. A picker apprehended stealing one will pay a fine.

As Luella Copeland sits quietly in a chair by the south window of the old farmhouse and evaluates the bears, deer and berries of her Babcock past, an awful screaming roar comes from somewhere the other side of the wall. She does not wince. It is only the future or the portent of it. For a few years now a first-world power has been sending war planes on training flights over her house and the lowland surrounding it. They drop fake bombs and real bombs. They strafe the metallic sheds of farmers. They swoop above the treetops like monstrous swallows. Civilization, so far away for so long, suddenly is about as close and loud as can be.

Babcock

Emerson Hough, writing in 1899, seemed to feel some qualms about the Yellow River citizenry. "These folks around here have just got it in for the rest of the universe," Hough wrote in *Forest & Stream Magazine*. "They don't mean to be unpleasant. It's just a way they have."

Babcock, said the noted novelist and sportsman, inhabited a district lumbered off for its pine 40 or 50 years before his visit. "Some of the hard wood has also been cut," he observed, "and their remains rather a barren and desolate looking country, covered with fallen trees, burned stubs of pine, poplar thickets and wide expanses of grassy marsh running in between the ridges, which have been stripped of their timber."

Hough said Babcock had been a division headquarters at the time the railroad went through in 1873. "There was an auction sale of lots, one brief day of glory, and then Babcock settled back with a dull, heavy sag into a position from which it has never since attempted to emerge. A so-called farming community has tried to settle up that country, but the class of the population is like the soil itself, sullen and uncompromising. Every man hates himself as well."

Hough's acerbic account is contained in a pamphlet by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin entitled, "Passenger Pigeons." With his companions, he had come to hunt the prairie chickens then so numerous. More significantly, while the Hough party hunted, their guide, Varney, shot the last passenger pigeon observed wild in Wisconsin.

"Still another bit of news, and rather an important one, came out during our little trip," wrote Hough. "While we were cleaning our birds at lunch time on the first day, our guide Varney pulled out of

his pocket some turtle doves which he had innocently been shooting that morning. Among these was a bird to which he called our attention, saying it was 'too big for a dove' and he did not know what it was."

"Why, that's a pigeon!" cried another hunter. "It's a young wild pigeon."

Varney had shot the pigeon early in the morning while it perched in a tree, the largest of a flock gathered next to a buckwheat field. The bird was about two-thirds grown and the plumage was yet pale and devoid of the luster of an adult bird. The tail feathers had been pulled out in the pocket of Varney's hunting coat, but they were secured for identification purposes, as was the skin of the bird.

Along with the great circus-train wreck of 1910, the death of this little bird ensures Babcock's place in our history books.

The town, unlike so many of our river cities, did not arise among sawmills and shingle mills. The "History of Wood County" (1923) offers a picturesque portrayal of Babcock's beginnings.

At an earlier time, a settlement called Remington was started on the west side of the Yellow River, opposite what would become Babcock. Meanwhile, J.W. Babcock, a Necedah sawmill owner closely associated with certain officials of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, having ascertained the railroad had decided to build a branch through Remington, attempted to buy privately the Remington site. Unable to do so, he sent his agent across the river to buy land, without mentioning, of course, the proposed rail line.

Having secured all the land needed, the Babcock Land Co. and the railway company made Babcock a division point,



Babcock

built a roundhouse and started trains there after 1873. A number of railroad men made Babcock their home and, for a while, it flourished. The railroad company built the large Oakland Hotel and arranged their time schedules so that all trains stopped at Babcock to give crews and passengers a meal. Other hotels, including one moved across the river from Remington, were established. There were also places, and not the least popular, said the "History of Wood County," where thirsty travelers could quench their thirst with beverages not to be legally obtained at the time of the prohibition publication of the "History."

A dozen or so homes were erected by the land company for the families of railroad men. There were at least one of such classic accoutrements of village life as the general store, dance hall, livery stable, clothing store, post office and restaurant. The general offices of the railroad were west of the depot with railroad shops across the track. A water main carried water from the railroad tank just west of the depot to the Oakland Hotel.

The prosperity of Babcock lasted,

however, only as long as the village remained a railroad division point. When the general offices followed the timber line to Wausau and the shops moved to Tomahawk, the railroad men left too. According to the 1923 history book, "a period of depression and stagnation set in from which the place has not yet fully recovered." The Oakland Hotel itself was destined to become a rescue home for "mothers and children."

All in all, thought Emerson Hough, it had become a solemn, weird, doleful sort of country. "You wouldn't see a smile there in a hundred years, and every one acts as though he wanted to make you unhappy because he is unhappy himself."

For my part however, I have always been partial to such "unhappy" places as Wamsutter, Wyo., Trombley, Mich., Colchester, Ill., and Babcock. Maybe, like any River City historian, I have a soft spot in my transcendental heart for a place that has known better days and shows it, a Main Street with a hangover of a past, a town that plays the blues like a great Hank Williams symphony.



Babcock

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Pittsville

The editor of the Wood County Reporter wasn't ready to award Pittsville the county seat, though, as he said, the city was making rapid strides toward becoming "a metropolis of no mean proportions."

When the Grand Rapids journalist visited in March 1887, Pittsville had not yet settled into being what some later saw as a center of bucolic somnolence. It was a boom town, thriving on the manufacture of hardwood lumber products.

The S.C. Harmon & Son factory had not yet started up for the season but would soon. "Their yard is well filled with stock which will keep them busy all summer until late in the fall." Doud & Son's stave mill was doing a good business and Mr. Lynch's new mill ran day and night.

At the Pittsville newspaper office, the Rapids writer spoke with the Independent editor, Mr. Germer. He also discussed the hardships of camp life and early history of western Wood County with an old pioneer, James Quick Severns, who had come to the county in 1850 as the first settler in Wood township. Severns had built the first sawmill in Pittsville, for C.D. Newbury, to be later known as "Pitts Mill."

Severns told the Reporter that he had cut the first brush on the site of what was later to be Pittsville on April 17, 1856. That was the year Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Pitts arrived at the Yellow River, bearing the patronym that was to designate the site for the next century and more.

Pitts, born 1831, had told his father, Luke, that he and his bride, the former Freeloze Chase, were heading west from their Pennsylvania home for central Wisconsin, where good timberland was available for next to nothing. Two years

later, Luke, 50, his wife and sons, Thomas, John and Luke, set out after Oliver on the two-month journey by "prairie schooner."

Luke found his eldest boy living in a small hand-hewn log cabin with Freeloze and Susie, their baby. The two families went to work on a new dwelling. Before winter, they moved into a large, barnlike double house with two fireplaces. Their "clearing" soon became known as Pitts Mill, a recognizable stopping place for pinery men going up and down the Yellow River. Only a half-dozen whites actually lived at Pitts Mill, however, such as Wallace Potter, William Baker and Elijah Vroom.

Despite any scholarly paucity, however, in the fall of 1859, 15-year-old Thomas Pitts set up a school in one corner of the big house for children and whatever woodsman might want to while away in this way winter moments. Civilization accrued further the following spring when a Yankee Trader named Goodsell spread out a pack's worth in a rude hut and opened Pitts Mill's first mercantile establishment.

The population of the clearing and the school was decimated by the outbreak of the War Between the States. Thomas, 17, John, 23, and Oliver, 30, joined the Union forces, leaving the Lukes Sr. and Jr. with the four females. Severns sold his mill, six years idle, at this time to the Pittses and joined up with Company G of the 37th Wisconsin Infantry. He was wounded but returned to his family. Oliver and Thomas also came back, but not John. Fighting with the famous Iron Brigade, John had fallen at Chancellorsville.

After the war, mills sprang up along the Yellow River "like prairie flowers in



1882 Pittsville's River Street (1st Avenue): Cotey Building, smokestack of A.J. Webster Hub & Spoke, smokestack of Doud stave mill, Pitts Hotel, Pitts home

spring," according to Cecil L. Munson in the Jan. 26, 1935, *Daily Tribune*. L.A. Houston built a saw mill for Mr. Hurlburt and A.J. Webster assembled a water mill for a hub and spoke factory. About this time, the scepter of the conifer king, George Hiles of Dexterville, had been raised also.

For a while, however, Pitts Mill remained a Pitts town. Thomas bought Goodsell's store, the only one until A.B. Cotey's in 1878. Thomas and Luke ran the only hotel. Oliver operated the shingle mill and the family farm.

The site of what had become "Pittsville" was surveyed March 31, 1883, by H.W. Remington for George Hiles. In 1886, a village of Pittsville was incorporated. A year later, Pittsville changed to a "city" of between 1,100 and 1,500 people, compared to a 1980 census of 810.

According to the "History of Wood County," there never was much pine in

the Pitts Mill area. "The real life of the community began about forty years ago," said the 1923 book, "at which time some mills were erected for the manufacture of hardwood lumber. The hardwood manufactured being cut into barrel, wagon and beer keg stock."

By the time of George Hiles' death in 1896, Pittsville had used up that resource. The hardwood depleted, related industries closed down; their owners moved away one by one and, in most cases, took their money with them. In the place of the lumber barons and lumberjacks came the farmers, buying up cutover 40s at what they hoped were cut-rate prices in the hopes of hacking from the stumpland another kind of crop. Many of them were successful enough for their children and grandchildren to sell the farms 90 years later, take the money and move back to the town that had in some way made it all possible, Pittsville.

Vesper

For twenty years, old Vesper boomed on the west bank of the Hemlock Creek. Then, fulfilling the common doom of the genre, the sawdust metropolis was wiped out by fire.

It had also begun in flames, when the steam-powered Gerard mill in the town of Seneca burned, to be rebuilt later that year (1874) at a site "removed from that of the one destroyed, a position contiguous to their timber lands having been selected." The second location was likely the place later named Vesper.

After two years of sawing, Gerard (also spelled Girard) and his partner, Drake, sold to the Wharton brothers (also spelled Whorton and Horton) of Appleton, whose foreman was James W. Cameron. Cameron, with Henry Sherry and George Gerry (also spelled Jerry), bought out the Whartons.

The first newspaper references found naming this place Vesper came in 1883, shortly after it acquired a post office. "Times are dull here at present," wrote the April 19, 1883, Reporter. "Both mills have shut down waiting for logs and the road to dry up." The Sherry & Co. mill sawed pine and made shingles. The other mill belonged to the MacKinnon company and used red or white oak in the manufacture of wagon-wheel spokes.

On June 14, 1883, a newspaper writer visiting Vesper was impressed by the furnishings provided by "Messrs. Cameron and Jerry." "They feed, bed and furnish their help the most complete of any mill company that we have visited in years."

The reporter rode the new Wood County Railroad "from jumping off place, to jumping off place, a distance of about three miles. It is a pleasure to ride on this road built through thick woods

and swamps."

"A crew of 30 men are still pushing ahead this line northward and in the course of a month or such a matter work will begin on the line between Vesper and either Centralia or Port Edwards," he wrote. Vesper is booming and Messrs. Cameron and Jerry are the men to make it boom."

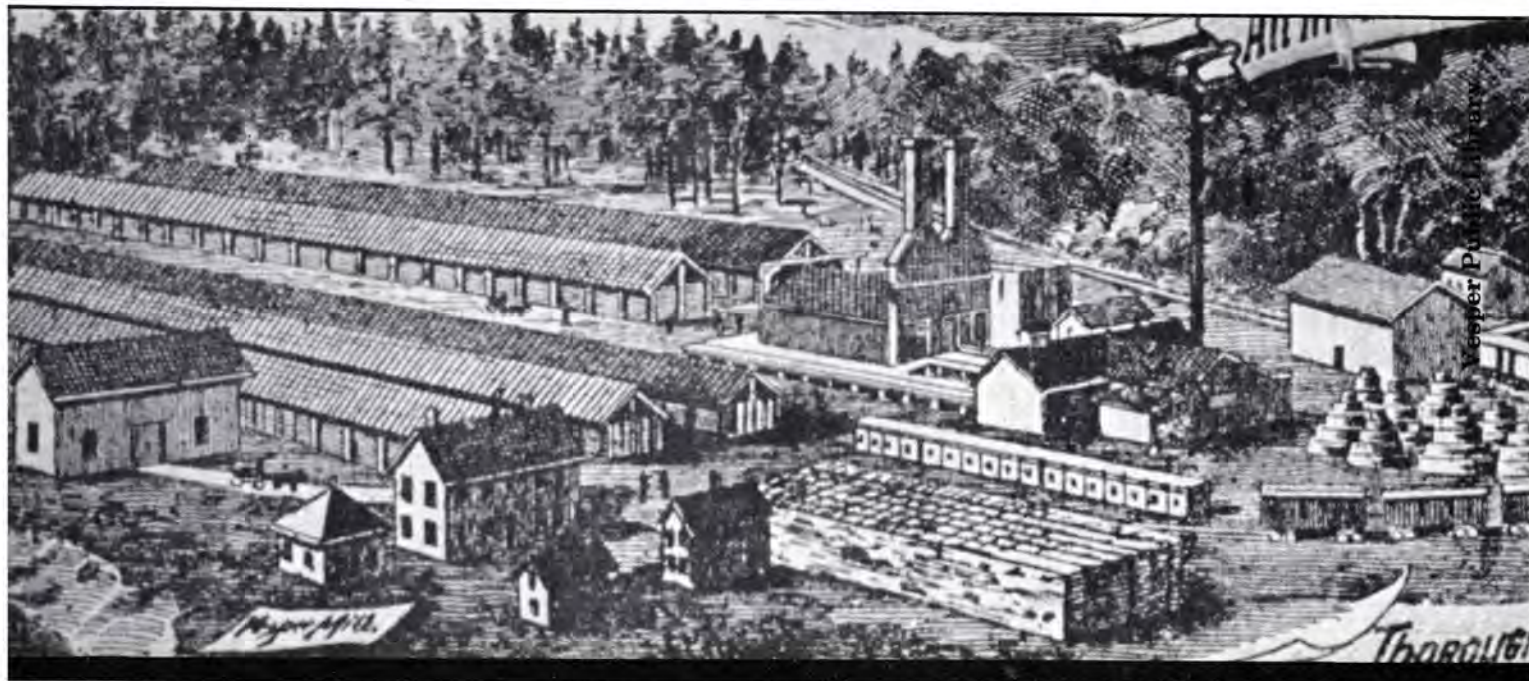
Sherry & Co. built a new saw mill in 1887, described by the Reporter of Aug. 24, 1887. "The main structure, which is a labyrinth of massive timbers, is nearly enclosed . . . An able corps of artisans are busily engaged in placing in position the tremendous frames, pulleys, shafts and gearing, which are required to connect and control the numerous machines to be used in and around the premises. There are two large wings on the southeasterly side of the mill, one being intended for the manufacture of lath and shingle, and the other for an engine room."

The company also built a new dam across Hemlock Creek, widened the street and extended the railroad track down the west bank to the new mill. "And now the residents on Brooklyn side can now boast of having a line of street cars running daily in front of their respective dwellings."

The Wood County Railroad, in addition to running short lines to the lumber camps, extended north as far as Sherry Station.

Another lumbering firm, J.W. Cirkel & Sons, who had recently burned out, "exhibited such pluck and business energy in replacing their stave mill, are making things lively at Cirkelville, which perhaps may properly be termed the 3rd ward in the city of Vesper."

This was old Vesper in the 1800s, at its



Old Vesper sawmill

peak, prosperous and proud, its *raison d'être* plentiful and ripe for harvest.

On August 28, 1894, *raison d'être* and reason for continuing ended. "The thriving little town is all but wiped out," wrote the *Centralia Enterprise and Tribune*. "Ashes and ruins mark the site of its former industry. The sawmill, planing mill, lumber in the yards and about 25 dwelling houses, in fact all of the little town west of Hemlock Creek, was totally wiped out by the fire."

The conflagration, said the *Enterprise*, originated in forest fires that had been running through the region for weeks. "But no immediate danger was apprehended. Tuesday afternoon about half past three o'clock the wind shifted to the south, and before anyone was aware of the danger, the fiery element was beyond man's control."

The fire was first observed in the large boarding house in the southwestern part of the town. From there, it leaped with ferocious rapidity to adjoining dwellings

and into the lumber yard where about 9 million feet of lumber were piled. "The sawdust burned like powder and a strong wind swept waves of flame over the doomed of the town. Half an hour after the fire started, the mills, lumber piles and houses were an angry roaring mass of flames."

There was barely enough time to save Mrs. Cameron's piano.

The Grand Rapids fire department brought its fire engine and hose carts out via the recently constructed Port Edwards, Centralia & Northern railroad, but could only survey the ruins. Speculated the *Enterprise*, "The fire will probably mean the wind-up of affairs at Vesper as the mill will not be rebuilt, all of the timber of the company having been cut."

As in many such instances, the flames had been only one step ahead of destiny anyway as the last scraps of riches for the most part already exploited, fueled the dramatic end to old Vesper.

Rudolph

Better termed Reed's Mill, "old Rudolph" means the hamlet a mile west and one-half mile north of the present village where once reposed a sawmill, boarding house, company store, schoolhouse and a few residences.

Reed's Mill exists almost out of our grasp. No one remembers it. It has not been documented. A few records remain in courthouses, archives and newspapers.

It was probably 1856 when Isaac Reed of Berlin, Wis., bought the timberland and put up his mill. That was the year Wood became a county and Rudolph became a township. Reed took out a mortgage on adjoining parts of sections five and six in the township of Rudolph. Tax records relating to the mill in 1857 show its value at more than \$4,000. That year, Isaac sold his property to his son, Henry, then living in Maine.

In 1859, the mill and improvements were placed by tax records in section five rather than six as it had been. The land was valued at \$3 per acre.

1860 brought at least two disasters. In February, according to the Wood County Reporter, a Mr. Chase had met with a serious accident at Reed's Mill. Dr. Witter treated the victim, who was improving as rapidly as could be expected. "Chase is one of nature's noblemen," said the Reporter, "and his 'best holt' is to get around as soon as possible."

On June 30, the Reporter said that Reed's Mill had burned the previous Monday just as the "hands" left for breakfast. Before aid could be rendered, the mill burned to the ground. "The fire originated by the friction of the jointer in the wooden groove," the Reporter speculated. Although no lumber had been destroyed, the machinery was considered severely "injured" and probably "ruined." The loss was estimated at \$4,000. "We believe there is no insurance," said the Reporter. "Mr.

Reed is at present on the Mississippi endeavoring to dispose of the products of his winter's labor. He has the sympathies of all in this section."

The Reporter reporter visited Reed's Mill on a rainy October Monday in 1860. He found John Albee, the Elliott and Freeman "boys" and a large crew rebuilding the mill. "A substantial dam and foundation have been made and the frame nearly completed. It will be the largest mill in the pinery by fifteen feet."

After supper, amid mist and darkness, the writer groped his way to the school house "in the woods about half a mile from any road" to hear a political speech, along with what he considered a surprising turnout of 20.

The mill was soon completed and "ready for action." The saw was a rotary capable of cutting 1,600 feet of lumber per day.

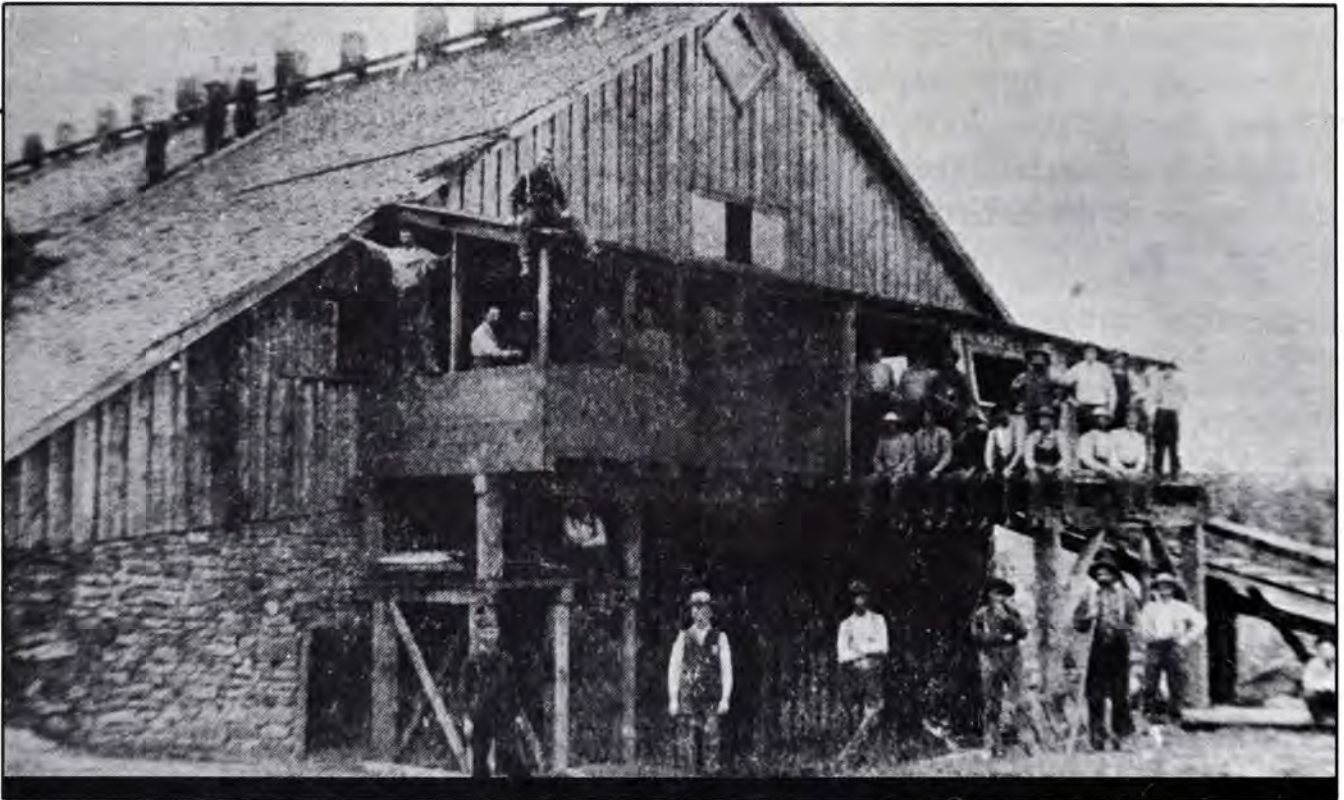
"Big sawing" was soon done. On April 6, 1861, the Reporter printed these statistics. "Reed's Mill, situated in Rudolph, this week in 11 hours and 55 minutes, from 5½ o'clock A.M., to 6½ o'clock, P.M., (deducting one hour and 5 minutes for dinner), cut from 82 logs, without respect to size, 23,825 ft. of inch boards. The size of the saw is 52 inches, a circular.

"A common edger was used, and but one extra man was employed. Such enterprise and skill speaks well for Messrs. Albee and - - -. When that sawing is beat, the boys say they will try again."

Industry brought more casualties. In May 1862, Mr. Mullen, "engaged in running lumber for Henry Reed, was drowned at the Nekoosa dam last Tuesday P.M. Three others were over board but escaped. Mr. Mullen was an industrious and worthy man. He leaves a wife and two children."

In 1863, a French-Canadian became entangled in a saw at the mill. His head, arms and legs were severed.

In 1866, Henry Reed entered a partner-



Clark & Scott Mill, 1890

ship with E.C. Clark and J.P. Scott of Dubuque, Iowa, in which each received a third of the property, subject to previous debts, including a mortgage to Isaac Reed.

In 1867, Henry Reed, for reasons other than the Rudolph mill, went bankrupt. His interest in the property became the property of Clark and Scott. The Clark and Scott mill was listed in section 6 and valued at \$4,728 in 1868.

Among those working for the new owners was Frederick Rudolph Hecox, after whom the township is named. He had a contract to tote merchandise from Centralia to their store at the mill. He would leave before daylight and get back about 8 or 9 at night.

The coming of the Wisconsin Valley Railroad in 1874 both helped and hindered Reed's Mill. For a time, it offered an easier method of obtaining supplies and an alternative route to market the lumber

sawn. Previously it had been floated down Mosquito Creek or hauled to the Wisconsin River. However the railroad missed Reed's Mill by a mile. A spur was installed but the village's doom was sealed. The farm town of the 20th century, "new Rudolph" was bound to be on the tracks.

Clark, still of Dubuque, and Scott, of Wood County, sold out on Aug. 31, 1896. The mill property went to Julien Moscicki, except for the Fred Hecox house, which would be moved and except for a "crop" already growing, which would be harvested by Scott. Moscicki reserved 13 rows of potatoes already sold to him.

Moscicki also got 150 feet of track on which lumber used to be run from the sawmill, 2,000 feet of cull lumber, 2,000 feet of pine covering boards, some thousands of feet of "\$8 lumber" and 89 acres. He also owned the ghost of half a town, Old Rudolph.

Saratoga

Mabel Johnson thought nothing of her 79-year-old Grandpa sitting motionless in the kitchen chair that warm June day, but she knew she must be quiet. The children always had to be quiet as John Peter Madsen rested. He was known to be grumpy.

This time, though, was different. When Mabel's mother, Alice, saw Madsen, she touched him and called to Mabel's brother, "Johnny, go and get Aunt Minnie. Grandpa is dead."

Aunt Minnie Petersen brought more aunts to prepare the body for burial while Mabel's father, Mads Peter Johnson, went up town to Grand Rapids to buy a coffin and some ice. They returned after dark, placed Grandpa's body in a coffin and put the ice in a tub near the casket for Mabel to puzzle over. How did ice freeze in summer?

After the funeral in the house (Mads Peter wore a band of black crepe on his hat), the coffin was hauled on Uncle Andrew Hansen's lumber wagon to the Pioneer Cemetery. Mabel rode behind with cousin George in a two-seated buggy.

As she stood by the open grave, Mabel watched the men lower the coffin with ropes and heard sand thud against the wood three times as the minister spoke: "Earth to earth; ashes to ashes; dust to dust."

In a written narrative describing classic incidents of central Wisconsin immigration and homesteading, Mabel Johnson, now 89, describes, among many vivid incidents, the 1902 death of her paternal grandfather.

He who died quietly in the chair had bravely left his home and family in Denmark in the early 1860s to find a place in the new world. His first choice, the town of Seneca, did not suit him. After a few years, he chose the town of Saratoga. When he had established a home, he sent for his wife, Metta, and his two youngest children,

Minnie and Peter. Peter took his father's first name as his last and, in Scandinavian fashion, became Mads Peter Johnson.

On the other side of her family, Mabel's maternal great-grandfather traveled to Quebec in 1852 by sailboat. The trip lasted six stormy months for Peter Jensen and his six children. His wife had died in the motherland. From Quebec, the Jensens came by land to Kilbourn on the dells of the Wisconsin River. One of his children was Mabel's grandmother, Martha.

The event that brought Martha and her husband together was to cause his painful death years later.

Tom Knuteson had come from Norway to Koshkonong, Wis., where he heard of the good times further north in the pinery. He moved up to Milladore to work in a logging camp. There, he met Jens, Martha's brother.

After a day of chopping timber, Tom, as was his wont, led the jacks in dancing and fiddling. The pounding feet caused pegs holding a rifle to the wall to give way. The gun fell and discharged. A bullet struck Tom, shattering his thigh.

Friend Jens realized Tom needed nursing care and fetched an Indian doctor and Jens' own sister, Martha, to whom the patient was later married.

Despite herbs and love, the wound did not heal. To kill the pain, Tom drank. His health declined. Two years before the end, he took to bed. Only then did he agree to an amputation.

Six men held him dead drunk to the kitchen table while physicians sawed his leg off at the hip. But blood poisoning had already set in. In 1885, "Old Tom Knuteson," once a pinery boy, died, leaving Martha and seven children, most of whom had by then married.

Tom and Martha had come to homestead in Saratoga on the Five Mile Creek. One of their children was Alice, Mabel's mother.



Oswald Menzel

Front: Kathryn, Mabel, John. Center: Alice, Mads Peter. Back: Emma, Clara. "I have a pout because Menzel took my new hat and put it on a pole," said Mabel.

The farms of John Peter Madsen and Tom Knuteson were two miles apart, but that made them neighbors then. Madsen's son, Mads Peter Johnson, beat a path through the woods to Alice, married her and took her home to the farm. Six children were born. The youngest was Mabel.

Mabel's mother often spoke of her younger days when she played with Indian children. One day an older Indian saw all the youngsters playing together and asked Alice's father if they were all his "papooses." He jokingly said, "yes," and the Indian went away shaking his head.

Mabel's father, "Pete," was a jack-of-all-trades who ran a blacksmith shop. Mabel liked to stop on her way from school and watch the sparks fly as he pounded a horse-shoe on the anvil.

On long winter evenings after the chores were done and the lamps lit, the Johnson family gathered around the stove. Mother knit stockings and mittens while father took baby Mabel on his lap. With John on

one side and Kate on the other, the immigrant told of his earlier life.

A goose herder in Denmark, he had earned 2 cents a day. In the Grand Rapids area, he had worked as a chore boy and dish wiper at Rablin's boarding house and had worked at Natwick's saw mill.

Johnson often told the same "old country" stories over and over. The children listened anyway, charmed by plot and cadence: *The Six Men Who Traveled Around the World*; *The Copper Pot*; *The Blacksmith's Cat*. It was an adventure of the imagination secured by the crackle and warmth of the fire.

His daughter, Mabel, has a similar stove but she doesn't need it to tell a story. Do you know what she did after her Grandpa, John Peter Madsen, was buried back in '02? Mabel climbed up on top of the calf house and jumped up and down. She yelled at the top of her voice. She didn't have to be quiet any more!

Arpin

Raw material: pine.

Market: Midwest.

Labor: immigrants.

Transportation: PEC&N.

Capital: J.B. Arpin Lumber Co.

These forces combined in 1891 to produce an industrial phenomenon both unique and typical—Arpin, Wis.

For a busy decade, what is now a bread and cheese burg of modest proportions fulfilled the classic cycle of pinery exploitation. Lumbermen bought up large tracts of timber, built a mill and a railroad to serve it, logged off the land and immediately began selling the cutover to prospective permanent residents, most of them farmers of European origin.

This was in central Wisconsin the second major wave of logging. Fifty years previous, mills on the Wisconsin, Yellow and Black rivers had depended on the waterway for a lifeline. Now the railroad provided. In its development, Arpin was kin less to Grand Rapids or Nekoosa than to lumber towns further north such as Shanagolden, Auburndale and Mellen.

E.P. Arpin, a Grand Rapids businessman and public figure of the late 19th century and early 20th century, provides in his memoirs primary information on the town that became the chief perpetuation of his family's name. In 1882, Arpin wrote, his father's lumber company began buying up timber lands with Henry Sherry in the township later to be called Arpin. In 1890, "we had option on the Sherry and Arpin lands at \$200,000 for the two thirds interest held by the Sherry Cameron Co. We in turn offered the property with our interest to the J. Edwards Mfg. Co., but it was not accepted."

John Arpin and his sons, E.P. and D.J., therefore concluded to purchase the land themselves, organizing the John Arpin Lumber Co. in June 1891. Each held a third interest. "We started to build a dam

and mill site on the Hemlock Creek in the early spring."

At the same time John Arpin, along with other major figures of the Grand Rapids area, invested in the Port Edwards, Centralia and Northern railroad. Tracks were laid in 1891 to the sawmill. According to the Centralia Enterprise and Tribune of Aug. 22, 1891, the Arpin mill on the PEC&N "is now running smoothly, and is cutting about ninety thousand feet of high grade pine lumber per day."

Arpin wrote that the company was very busy "in the pioneer work of building roads, dams, bridges and camps and dwelling houses and saw mill at Arpin. The Sherry Cameron Co. extended their logging railway to our saw mill site and later on this was taken over by the George Hiles Land & Lumber Co. and sold to the S.M. & St. P. Ry. Co. and then the John Edwards Manfg. Co. With the aid of Walter Scott one of its members joined with others in the building of the Port Edwards and Northern Ry. from Port Edwards to Marshfield passing within one half mile of our saw mill."

Although "good connections to the outside world" were soon established, "at the start it was almost impossible to reach Arpin with a load of material and when we went there we were glad to use a railway velocipede to pump our way there and back to Grand Rapids."

No sawmill town history would be complete without a major fire and "Arpin" wasted no time in getting it under way. "We put up a large saw mill and had run it only a short time when it was burned down," wrote E.P.

Insurance money combined with cash on hand allowed "another but smaller mill" to be built "intending to run it night and day which we did and it served us very well."

The timber was close at hand, nearly all



Arpin saw mill, 1891.

of it to the north, which was a downhill pull, according to Arpin. "We operated the mill and logging and sawing at an economical basis and although we had hard times passing through the panic of 1893 we managed to win out and made \$450,000 at this plant."

The equipment for the Arpin mill had originally been transferred from another mill at Germantown. When in 1891 the best pines diminished and the Arpin mill found "breaking even" difficult, it was dismantled and most of the machinery moved 120 miles north, to a site near Bruce in Rusk County. What was left was sold to Bert Gaffney in 1904.

The mill was gone and is now little remembered. An Arpin "Centennial" book

published in 1973 evokes some images: men balancing on logs in the mill pond prodding with pike poles as a tram pulled the logs upward into the mill and the giant saws. Outside again, the lumber was loaded onto skids and pulled by oxen to a planing mill. Once planed, the lumber was piled in long rows of square piles.

A village had sprung up on a street near the mill. Close by was the home of Joe Arpin. Just west was a sleeping shanty for the men and a large boarding house. Other frame houses were built. A post office was established. Soon a dance hall, town hall, store, creamery and church stood like a row of suitors waiting for their mail-order brides. It was time for the next stage of civilization to arrive.

"When I was a boy," said Emil Mueller, "we wondered 'where were we going to shop?'" In the years following the closing of the Arpin mill, a choice was available. First, there was "old Arpin," the sawmill town that, in 1908, consisted of 17 company houses, a Presbyterian church, the Modern Woodman hall, Whittingham's store and post office, Damrow's creamery, Schumacker's saloon, Winebrenner's boarding house and August Mueller's saloon. At another place was "Martin's Town," a prospective "Arpin" a mile or so south of old Arpin and just east of the railroad tracks. Here, Martin Pfyle's hamlet had a store, saloon and cheese factory. Third was the depot site. The original railroad had missed old Arpin by three-quarters of a mile, a whim of fate that was to spell its doom.

The Schweitzer Heimat initiated the exodus in 1909. The first structure of the new town at the depot was this Swiss tavern, built by Jacob Grimm. "They could have named it 'Grimmville,'" said Louis Grimm, "when Grandpa's saloon was the only building in town."

Soon added were Wittman's blacksmith shop, Roehrig's livery stable, Roehrig's hardware store, Jim Howlett's saloon, the Soo Line depot, the Northwestern depot and the section foreman's house. Seeing the writing on the plat, Martin Pfyle abandoned Martin's Town and move his own store to Arpin.

Whittingham's store and the Winebrenner hotel soon complemented the earlier entries. "They just moved out of the old town," Gay Vandenberg said. "They tore down the old company houses and rebuilt them."

Moving into the settlement were new people, come for the most part to farm the rich soil between the stumps left by the John Arpin Lumber Co. In the interim between arrival and homestead, the immigrants lived where they could, often in abandoned buildings.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Vandenberg and family came in 1912 from Sheboygan and, on a cold November day, found shelter in what seemed to be a boarding house. They lived in the cold, many-windowed "mansion" until they could purchase 80 acres of land overpopulated by stumps and a woodchuck for every stump.

Charlie Grimm came from Monroe in 1900 and worked with his new wife, Fannie Altman, for the Arpins while the Grimms cleared their land and built their first home. "My dad, with his brother and their dad, drove eight cows to Wood County with a team of oxen and a covered wagon," said Louis Grimm, who now lives in that first house. "He walked three miles to the mill, wheeled lumber 10 hours a day for 10 cents an hour and walked home. My mother worked in the Arpin boarding house. The country was wild, nothing but brush, stumps and big rocks, and not a furrow plowed. In the valleys, you could see pine stumps. Arpin took the cream."

Emil Passer came from Fort Atkinson in 1897, after seeing an advertisement in a German-language newspaper listing "wooded acreage in Wood County for sale by George Reynolds." He rode with his brother, August, in a "Milwaukee St. Paul" box car with his cattle and horses. The rest of the two families arrived three days later in another boxcar, this one filled with family possessions of a more civilized sort, such as furniture.

The group lived at the old logging camp until homes could be built. In the meantime, Passer men, women and children helped clear the land. Daughter Martha also worked as a cook for the Arpins. In 1903, she married Herman Mueller, whose moveable sawmill supplied lumber for many of the buildings of new Arpin.

Herman Mueller came from Brillion in 1895, with his brother, August. For a time, the Muellers shipped hardwood



Street Scene in 1900's, present location.

fuel to lime kilns in distant parts of the state.

The Matt Cutler family came in 1901 from Fond du Lac, in a boxcar loaded with cows, horses, machinery and furniture. The first time he actually saw "Arpin" was in the summer of 1902, said Percy Cutler in the comprehensive "Arpin Centennial" book (1973). "I came to meet the train . . . Arpin was all trees and brush right up to the railroad tracks, where now stands the village."

William Proesel came in 1897 from Illinois, with five friends who had purchased 480 acres. They spent the winter in an unused logging camp north of Arpin. In spring, they put up a frame building and lived there until each had his own building. Money was obtained by cutting wood off their land.

Steven and Martha Stoflet came in 1899 from Sun Prairie and lived with their seven children in a logging camp while clearing 60 acres that first winter. The logs were hauled to the Connor sawmill at Auburndale. In spring, they sowed grain among the stumps.

Immigrants came from Sweden in 1896. They worked at the Arpin mill and

cut timber on their own lands, becoming farmers in the end.

More immigrants, originally from Holland, came in the 1890s and 1900s, brought by a smooth-talking land agent in Chicago who convinced them life would be a breeze where land was cheap. They hauled logs to Arpin and Sherry mills to get lumber for their homes, some working in the Arpin mill while clearing their land.

A group of Jewish would-be farmers came in 1904 from Milwaukee and settled on a large tract of land.

Further west, at Bethel, Seventh Day Adventists began their separate but interrelated community.

These and many more had come to settle Arpin: Bymers, Elmer, McChesney, Schultz, Kohls, Sommerfeldt, Johnsrud, Thiemke, Esser, Wernberg, Zieher, Becker, Hohn, Edwards, Sawin, Schill, Graham, Lochner, Wittman, Gruetzman, Yoss, Schiller, Snow, Kegler, Lewis, Broecker, Morris and Hamel. In 1890, there had been none. Now there was a whole klatsch of adventuresome and futuristic Arpin enthusiasts.

Skunk Hill

My paralyzed limbs nevertheless grew like roots across the land as I tried to rise and turn but no matter how hard the struggle within I could not affect my arms and legs; helplessness succumbed to doom, a great scream flew across the night and I was awake.

It was not my voice. A large bird, or the shadow of it, passed over the place as I lay dreaming at 3 a.m. on Aug. 22, 1983, under a spruce tree at Powers Bluff, also known

as Skunk Hill. I had slept less than an hour.

Now I could get up and walk in the moonlight, past the cemetery and the eternal red light of the radio tower, past the warming house to the northwest escarpment. From its crest, where all had been dark 100 years ago, could be seen clusters of lights. These were villages illumined by the ambition of Mr. Arpin, Mr. Sherry, Mr. Cameron, Mr. Connor and friends.



1924



Mr. Levi Parsons Powers, a prominent businessman and judge of Grand Rapids, apparently lent his name to Powers Bluff, although he never owned it nor lived on it. In the past, the bluff was commonly called Skunk Hill. Its earliest known name was Tah-qua-kik.

Rising 300 feet above the surrounding land, this Arpin-area landmark, the eroded peak of an ancient quartzite mountain, is the highest point in Wood County. In relatively recent geologic time, about 500 million years ago, the mountain remnant began to sink beneath a sea to be buried by sediment. When it emerged, the shale and sandstone was stripped away by erosion and the naked rock stood much as it does now.

Our "history" of Skunk Hill begins around 1880, when Vesper, a few miles to the south, enjoyed its industrious beginnings and a series of absentee land-investors passed between them a large tract of timberland including the hill: Sampson to Lloyd to Scott to Nash.

In 1885, T.E. Nash, of the PEC&N railroad, signed a contract with the Henry Sherry company (Sherry, Geo. W. Gerry and James Cameron) in which Nash agreed to manufacture oak and bass wood into stave bolts "the exact length and quality to be the same as that generally required by J.W. Circkles and Sons at their [Vesper] factory . . . also to cut into logs and deliver

on the skids at convenient places on said lands all the white oak on said lands fit for merchantable logs."

Besides the hardwood timber on top, some suspected another commodity underneath. When Nash sold to William Grant of Milwaukee in 1887, he reserved to himself a royalty of 40 cents per ton on all "merchantable" iron ore. Grant was to begin sinking test pits within a year.

"There is considerable excitement about iron prospects [at] Skunk Hill," corroborated E.P. Arpin in his journal of June 9, 1887. On June 10, he and his brother, D.J., traveled "up to Skunk Hill and examined prospect holes there." Not much appears to have come of these exploratory digs.

Although they didn't yet own the bluff, the Arpins had interests there. E.P. wrote, on Dec. 7, 1889: "Made sale to J.W.C. [Cameron] logs on Skunk Hill."

On Dec. 11, Arpin referred to a new logging camp started on Skunk Hill by his family's John Arpin Lumber Co. The following day he wrote, "Closed deal with Mr. Cameron on the timber Skunk Hill. Located camp on SWSE 28 and walked to Vesper. Recd \$2,000 on log deal."

The owners of John Arpin Lumber Co. bought Skunk Hill in the 1890s and owned it until they closed out their Wood County holdings in 1904, retaining the right to remove their planing mill at "old" Arpin.

The Arpin firm sold the acreage to the Oftelie and Stondall Land Co. of Madison. From Oftelie and Stondall, Skunk Hill went to C.E. King. From C.E. King, it became the property of personnel who used another semantic configuration: 40 acres to Squaquishgoqua, Shohn, John Louie, Mixequa, Keo Komoquah and Shau Wa Gnouck. These were Potawatomi who had paid \$125 each.

By 1928, all Indian names had been removed from that forty on top of Powers Bluff. Just south, however, four 20-acre plots still bore the titles of White Pigeon, Shon Kokach, Eagle Pigeon and J. Luly.

For these years, the Potawatomi had used government paper to own their land, although they believed it was theirs already. On Sept. 16, 1906, the Grand Rapids Tribune reported that "Arpin Indians" claimed Skunk Hill on the grounds that it had been set aside as a reservation and "startled" Arpin "settlers" by erecting shanties on tracts they liked.

The claim was not honored. A representative of the Department of Interior was quoted as stating the government tract books showed no such entry.

Another reference to the "Arpin Indians" in 1917 said "survivors of the Potawatomi tribe of Indians residing at Powers Bluff" had reasons to expect 80 years of back payments from the United States totaling \$427,000. The "survivors" nevertheless lost Skunk Hill because they did not pay the required property taxes. The land came into the hands of H.F. Roehrig, upon whose death his wife sold 50 acres to the township of Arpin in 1933. In 1936, the township of Arpin deeded Skunk Hill to Wood County under the name of Powers Bluff. A 1948 purchase added 50 acres on the north side. In 1962, the estate of Lloyd Felker donated 60 acres on the east. The cumulation is now a Wood County park.

So the old mountain became public property. Or, as the Daily Tribune of July 3, 1936, remarked regarding this island of owls, trilliums, perambulations and dreams in the sea of civilization that presently encircles it, "And so, again, Skunk Hill returns to all men, which is only another way of saying that it belongs to itself."

