



ARTIFACTS

Volume

March 1993

WOULD YOU LIKE TO OWN A PIECE OF LOCAL HISTORY?

In the 1920's, the J.D. Witter Traveling Library was formed as a service of the T.B. Scott Library in Grand Rapids. Forty-one branch libraries were kept stocked with an ever changing selection of books taken from the shelves of T.B. Scott Library. These branch libraries were located in stores, postoffices, hospitals and even homes, throughout Wood County.

Each branch library had a collection of forty-two books at a given time and the books were exchanged on a regular basis. The books were transported in wooden boxes with a hinged top and handles for carrying.

The museum has several of these boxes in storage and although we certainly will keep one or two of them, we do not have room to store all of them. So, we will sell them on a first come, first serve basis for only \$5.00 each.

They could be used for a storage box, or a wood box next to the fireplace. With a little cleaning and paint, they would make a good place to put off season sports equipment.

Anyway, stop in at the museum if you are interested. Several are filled with sand for sanding slippery walkways, so we may have to empty one for you-- unless you want the contents also.

Behind The Scenes

Wintertime is generally the season of year devoted to rearranging and reorganizing. This year has been no exception as we continue to review the materials on display and evaluate their presentation. We are in the final stages of the painting program, and marvel at what changes can be made when filling the cracks from twenty years of building use. Artifacts have been moved around a bit and cleaned of the fine plaster dust that has infiltrated every available space.

Although chaotic to some, we have nearly completed the first attempt at an inventory of the building. By May we should be able to guesstimate the approximate number of artifacts held in our collections. The process will continue as we compare the accession numbers to the descriptions that accompany the item. We have also experimented with entering the inventory into a computer database. Eventually we should be able to have better retrieval of items.

FIRE AT PORT EDWARDS

It seems like every community, whether it be a large city like Chicago or a small settlement such as Babcock, all have one major fire that threatens to obliterate the community. Port Edwards was not exempt from this distinction.

It happened on Sept. 2, 1921. Believed to have been started about noon by sparks from a steam switch locomotive, the fire spread rapidly from grass along the tracks to the pulpwood storage piles. The spread of flames was enhanced by a strong wind from the south which blew sparks and embers toward village homes. Many roofs of houses or buildings were ignited in this way. Other homes were saved by the diligent efforts of the home owners who sat on the roof with a garden hose or pails of water, ready to quench small fires. Some twenty homes incurred some fire damage.

Port Edwards had no Fire Dept. at that time. Accordingly, a call went out to neighboring communities to send help. Equipment was dispatched from Nekoosa, Stevens Point, Grand Rapids, and Marshfield. A second steam engine pumper from Grand Rapids was sent to the Green Bay & Western Railroad station to be loaded on a flat car and sent to Port Edwards by rail. But the lack of an available flat car caused the plan to be given up. The fire truck from Marshfield made a record run by covering the 38 miles in just 64 minutes! And the Stevens Point unit left the scene of the fire early when it was called back to Stevens Point to fight a fire in that city. Five hundred volunteers fought the fire in the 40 foot high log piles as well as those that broke out in the village.

About mid afternoon, the climax of the holocaust was reached when the pile collapsed and sent a shower of sparks and embers some 200 feet into the air, where the strong wind caught them and propelled them over the village.

Efforts of the fire fighters were directed at the prevention of the spread of flames to adjoining piles of pulp logs. Six hours into the fire, the heat was so intense that it was felt as far as two blocks from the fire. Eleven hose lines were stretched from the Wisconsin River to the fire several blocks distant from the river.

There were no hydrants in the area.

News of the fire rapidly spread to neighboring cities and parties of spectators began to arrive after dark having driven from Stevens Point and Marshfield. The colorful flames and flying sparks hadn't been duplicated since the Fourth of July fireworks.

Perhaps the greatest curiosity to most people was the antique steam operated fire engine pumper that came from Grand Rapids. A wagon load of coal and wood was parked along side of the rig to keep the boiler fired so the engine might do what was expected of it, that is, pumping water from the river to the fire.

The loss, which made L.M. Alexander, president of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company, say, "The sight made me sick. It nauseated me". The loss was set at \$150,000. However, the mill resumed operation the next day.

ARTIFACTS

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QUIZ

Uncle Josh visited in the area and told us where he had visited. But unfortunately, Josh has not been in the area for some time and he used names of locations that were used years past. Below are names of places in this Central Wood County area, identified by their old name. Can you identify them and let Uncle Josh know where he visited? In case you are lost also, answers are on the bottom of the page.

Frenchtown
Society Hill
Cranberry Street
Skunk Hill
The Four Mile
The Fair Grounds
Bear's Marsh
Bismark Avenue
Kipps Hill
Hurly Town
Dowdville
Remington

The 1993 Season marks the 20th year that SWCHS has operated a museum. We are planning some special events to help commemorate the anniversary. Our next newsletter will outline our summer programs and celebrations.

QUIZ ANSWERS

Frenchtown- Village of Port Edwards
Society Hill- Third Street-Museum area.
Cranberry Street- West Grand Avenue
Skunk Hill- Powers Bluff near Arpin
The Four Mile- Nepco Lake
The Fair Grounds- Witter Field
Bear's Marsh- Cranmoor
Bismark Avenue-Kellner (Whitrock St.)
Kipps Hill- Area of North Port Edwds.
Hurly Town-South Side of Wis. Rpds.
Dowdville-Two miles N of Wis. Rpds.
Remington- Babcock Village

GROSS TELLULOID VIDEOS

Paul Gross has reminded us that he has available at his store, a selection of video tapes, all dealing with some phase of local history. And the nice thing about it is that Paul donates \$5.00 to our historical society for each tape that he sells. They make excellent gifts for those out of town friends that would like to know about our area's history.

Thanks, Paul for remembering the Historical Society.

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DUES DUES DUES DUES DUES

If you haven't mailed your dues in for 1993, please do so as soon as possible. The annual membership fees are:

\$3.00 Single

\$5.00 Family

Remit monies to South Wood County Historical Corporation, 540 Third Street South, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494.

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MUSEUM REQUEST

In order to satisfy several suggestions made by museum visitors this past season, we have to have more toys for the new toy room. How about making a diligent search of the closet, attic or basement and if there is an antique toy located there, how about giving it to the local museum. Thanks.

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CRANBERRY CULTURE.

But few persons have any idea of the commercial importance of the cranberry to the State of Wisconsin, though the berry is acknowledged and appreciated by all as the last fruit of the season. In the year of 1878 there was more than 7,600 acres of land used for the cultivation of this berry, and at present more than twice that area is under cultivation, and fully twice as much used as wild marsh, where the berry grows to as high a state of perfection as in a cultivated marsh, although the yield cannot be as great on account of the inaccessibility. The cultivation of the berry consists simply in ditching, damming, draining, and flooding the marshes at the proper season of the year, the plants or vines being under water from November till May. To the cultivator the berry is a paying investment, as it costs but little to raise, and yields in return about thirty per cent, net, annually, on the investment in lands, selling in market for from \$2.50 to \$4.50 per bushel. Wisconsin is said to be entirely free from the blight common in the New Jersey marshes, and from the worm to be found in the marshes of Connecticut, and the attention of Eastern capitalists, who are becoming interested in the culture of the berry, is being drawn to the marshes of this State.

Wood County has some of the best marshes in the State, their yield being enormous, and more attention is being given this year to the berry than of any preceding it. The largest marsh in the State is owned and operated by the Grand Marsh Cranberry Company, located in Jackson County, near Beaver Station, on the line of the Wisconsin Valley Railroad, a branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul. In this marsh alone there are 4,500 acres, and has at the present time 600 acres under cultivation. Two hundred acres, started five years ago, will yield, it is estimated, this season, 200 bushels to the acre, and the remaining 400, about fifty bushels to the acre. This is an excellent crop, but will probably be doubled in another year.

Charles J. Adriance, the superintendent at the marsh, says the crop is a large one this year, but if properly cared for this Winter, the vines will bear double next season.

Extracted from HISTORY OF
NORTHERN WISCONSIN, PUB. 1881.

Page 1197.

The foregoing article had that
to say about cranberry culture.
Would our cranberry growing
members care to rebuttle to some
of the statements made?



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