

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY HISTORICAL CORPORATION

ARTIFACTS

Volume

JULY 22, 1997



"PLAYING AGAIN: EDISON'S PHONOGRAPHS"

Now playing at the South Wood County Historical Museum is Thomas A. Edison's favorite invention, the phonograph. Thomas A. Edison, born February 11, 1847 is one of the nation's greatest inventors. He is known for collaborating on several inventions including the incandescent light, the mimeograph, the automatic telegraph, telephone transmitter, stock ticker, and motion picture. But, of all the inventions, Edison's favorite was the phonograph.

1997 is the celebration of Edison's Sesqui-centennial. Thomas A. Edison, who brought

light and music to the world would be 150 years old this year.

Over 20 original Edison phonographs will be on exhibit at the SWCHC Museum from July 8, 1997 through October 26, 1997. The exhibit is presented by Robin and Joan Rolfs of Audio Antique LLC. The Rolfs are nationally recognized for their expertise in phonograph research and restoration. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rolfs are instructors in Fox Valley school districts, inspiring students to become more inventive in the Edison tradition.

TAKE THE BUS

Depart Nekoosa on the hour, arrive in Port Edwards fifteen minutes later and Wisconsin Rapids on the half hour. Seven cents was the fare from Nekoosa to Port Edwards and fourteen cents from Wisconsin Rapids to Port Edwards. Reduced rates were in effect for children. Service began at 6:30 AM and continued every hour until 10:30 PM.

Sounds pretty convenient and it was just that. Intercity bus service was inaugurated upon the demise of the street car line in the depression years of the 1930's. John Schenk purchased the Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company bus that had been used in conjunction with their flying program. The Buick bus seated twelve passengers and carried luggage on the roof --except there was rarely a passenger that showed up with luggage for the short trips between the tri-cities. And the bus line was called the Tri-City Bus company

Larger busses came onto the scene as business increased, especially during World War Two. They usually resembled today's school busses. However, for a short period, a coach style vehicle was used, it having been purchased from Art Hager who used it for meeting trains in Adams, Wisconsin. It was known as the "400 Coach".

Bus drivers on the Tri-City Bus routes wore uniforms that included a policeman style cap and black leather boot spats. The writer remembers one driver who routinely would get out of the bus at the Nekoosa terminal, (gas station on

corner of Pointe Bass Ave. and Wood Ave.) and kick the tires of the bus; evidently his pretrip safety check.

The bus line lost its popularity after World War Two when gasoline was no longer rationed, and was finally abandoned in the early 1950's.

One other bus service of the area that also fell by the wayside after World War Two, was the Consolidated bus between Biron and Wisconsin Rapids. Primarily intended for mill workers who lived in one city and worked in the other, the bus was an employee perk provided by Consolidated Papers Inc.

Long distance bus service was provided by Wisconsin & Michigan Bus Company which provided daily service to Milwaukee from these communities. But this service has not been provided for over thirty years now.

But all the foregoing does not mean that we are without busses in this area today. However it is all directed toward school service and charters. Lamers and Safeway are the present providers of this service.

ARTIFACTS

A publication of
South Wood County Historical Corporation
540 Third Street South
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494
(715) 423-1580

Editor: Pam Walker

ARTIFACTS is a publication that contains articles and information for the members of the South Wood County Historical Corporation. Its contents are not copyrighted.

Dogs, especially worthless ones, are getting too numerous in this city. In fact they have become a nuisance. It is recommended that, at their next meeting, our city fathers pass an ordinance placing a tax from \$2 to \$5 on dogs, according to their sex, and that the Marshal be ordered to kill such animals running around which do not wear a tag, indicating that such has been paid. Owners of a valuable dog can well afford to pay such tax, and dogs not worth it are not needed in the community.

Centralia Enterprise
March 17, 1887

In one of the wards in Grand Rapids, a few ladies offered to cast their votes for city officers, but were refused the privilege. The inspectors took a different view of the law than the fair applicants did and refused the female ballots. The matter will probably be laid before the Supreme Court as soon as warm weather sets in.

Centralia Enterprise
April 7, 1887

Mr. Fred H. Jackson has been slightly under the weather of late. No apparent cause is assigned for his indisposition, except that he had his winter's crop of hair harvested too early in the season.

Centralia Enterprise
April 7, 1887

Mr. Wright, the spring poet and contributor to the Tribune, who was locked up in the county jail for petty larceny, broke jail on Saturday evening last, and is still at large, sleeping under the broad canopy of heaven, listening to the sweet music of the birds and putting into rhyme another double run of stanza for the edification of Ed Brundage's readers.

Centralia Enterprise
May 5, 1887

Sesquicentennial Fever

During May 1998, Wisconsin will begin celebrating its 150th birthday! State and local events will recapture glimpses of bygone eras.

The South Wood County Historical Museum will participate by offering a series of events scheduled throughout the summer. We have already adopted a special logo that appears with our newspaper advertising. This design reminds us to recount all 150 years of history that the state is celebrating...not just 1848.

We are hoping to sponsor a weekly series in *The Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* referencing events of 150, 100 and 50 years ago. These snippets afford those who have not lived during a particular time period to read about the important events that have magically shaped our lives today in Wisconsin.

Two new Museum exhibits will reflect early Grand Rapids and Centralia. **"Stitching to Statehood: Handcrafts from Home"** will provide an understanding of the special handiwork done to make the furnishings of the early settlers. Weaving, quilting and rug making will be featured in this presentation with some of SWCHC's oldest textiles on display. Local craft groups will provide hands-on demonstrations.

Lumbering and the camp blacksmith shop will be reinvented in the basement room formerly housing the "old" blacksmith shop. Dave Engel will assist in providing a story of the lumbering business in the Rapids area from 1831 - 1890. The lumbering artifacts, including the replica lumber raft will find a new home in the exhibit.

Our Oral History project will begin Phase II as we tape a series of interviews conducted with local individuals. There is a potential to publish the transcription in a booklet format as an addendum. Some of the information garnered will be utilized for a "pioneer wall". Voices, photos and events will test your knowledge on local celebrities.

Do you have suggestions on how we might celebrate? A display, event or program idea? Call the office and give us your suggestion....423-1580.

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July 16, 1997

Pam Walker and Staff
South Wood County Historical Corp.
540 3rd St. South
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494

Dear Pam and Staff,

Thanks to all of you for the wonderful afternoon at The Museum on June 19. The tours were informative and children had fun playing "Game of Graces" and eating ice cream on the lawn. The staff and volunteers of The Museum were helpful and courteous to all. Thank you Karen, Bernadine and John for leading the tours.

Also, thank you for the fine display of Wisconsin Rapids history that has been in our display cases this summer.

We appreciate your taking part in McMillan Library's Summer Library Program, "Zap Into the Past."

Sincerely,

Kathy Cindy Cheryl

The Children's Department Staff
Kathy Engel
Cheryl Marx
Cindy Miller

As the Years Run to Meet Us

Nostalgia, dandelions share the road of history

by **Dave Engel**

Wisconsin Rapids City Historian

When we are young, running with light and eager feet to meet the years, old times and ways have little appeal.

But when we feel the years running to meet us, old friends and old ways hold a strong interest. And to those of us who are fortunate enough to have been born here, it is not only interest but a peculiar kind of love that makes us go back over the years, pick out the old land marks and feel a pang of regret as the old buildings give place to the new.

If you think these are the shamelessly sentimental words of the gray-bearded author of *River City Memoirs*, you are only partly right.

Yes, he did think them but he was not the first. The original passage comes from a lecture by a writer who didn't give his name. Typed remarks imply the writer's grandfather is Joseph Wood, for whom we are called Wood County. It can also be guessed that the source is local historian George Wood. We will call him "Mr. Wood."

THE PORTAGE ROAD

Hoot mon, shet the duer, ken ye?

Many of the earliest "pioneers," according to Mr. Wood, traveled to this part of the pinery by horse or ox team from Galena, Ill., or from Chicago. In 1846, "Grandfather" Wood drove up from Lake County, Ill.

On one of his subsequent trips, he brought two wagon loads of shrubs, lilacs, Balm-of-Gilead trees and Lombardy poplars. Anyone who wanted

them was welcome to cuttings, which were planted all around the town. Another of Wood's excursions furnished household utensils, and, luxury of luxuries, a dozen mirrors. He also brought cone-shaped loaves of sugar, wrapped in blue paper.

When "the railroad" was routed as far north as Portage, the well-used road from that depot to Rapids became "the Portage road." It was soon "Milwaukee Street," marking the way to the state's largest city. When an orderly universe of numbers became irresistible, Milwaukee Street was renamed "8th Street."

The Wood family owned much of the eastern portion of Grand Rapids; the Rablins owned the north river bank; and the Neeves group the south river bank. Centralia, a.k.a. the West Side, belonged to the Garrisons and the Lyons.

"When Mr. Doudna was looking up material for his Wisconsin History," said Wood, "he told me he found the records of the first school, and that there was much 'jockeying,' as he expressed it, among the Wood, the Rablin and the Neeves interests, as to which neighborhood would get it; as we see, it was the Woods."

Thus the first schoolhouse was located on the north end of the Portage Road at the top of the hill, looking over the Grand Rapids.

The next school on Portage Road N. was "Howe." The janitor, Billy Bell, was a Scotchman known for growing pansies at his house on the south side bluff known as "Sand Hill." In those days,

because the heavy doors on the Howe Building had no springs to close them, pupils became familiar with William's slogan, "Hoot mon, shet the duer, ken ye?"

ARPIN CREEK

Ramblin' roads and rivulets

The "ramblin' roads" of the 1850s were like the Indian trails they followed, said Wood. Baker Street reached the top of the hill, turned north and east and followed "the brow of the hill" to the Portage road.

The business part of the town began on the hill and worked its way down toward the river. On the hillside, small wooden bridges or logs crossed the many rivulets. A good-sized stream, sometimes called Arpin Creek, had to be spanned, east of the E.P. Arpin house. On that stream, John Wagner, a cabinet maker, kept a shop, from which came a chest of drawers owned by Wood's grandmother and a chair Wood noticed in Isaac Witter's private office.

On the same stream was D.P. Morrill's tannery. "Further along" was a tavern and hotel run by a French Canadian, "Frechette."

Many of the first people lived on an Island formed by "Arpin Creek" and the Wisconsin River. Here, circuses held forth and farmers left their teams on Saturdays. When the stream came to be buried in sewers, the Island became the East Side Market Square.

WATER STREET

Cleaned out by fire

North along the Wisconsin River on Water Street, stood the Rablin mill, general store, boarding house and later the Rablin home. South along the river were a store or two and the Roche House hotel. Through the years, most of the town's businesses moved south to the area nearer the bridge. In 1853, there were two hotels, the Wisconsin House and Grand Rapids House. After a fire

cleaned this area out in the 1860s, the Rablin House became *the* hotel until it too fell victim to "the conflagration."

QUALITY ROW

An unpretentious little Quality Row

A relatively new road extending south from the bridge along the bluff was first named High Street by Wood's father. With so many wealthy couples building big houses, some liked to call it "Quality Row." It became Third Street.

In Wood's youth, little cabins or ruins of them where workmen had lived followed the river road out to Sand Hill. Townspeople, especially the young, walked the trainways down toward the Northwestern bridge, continuing on to pick wintergreen berries on B.M. Vaughn's land.

Ruins of an old mill could be seen along the river. "Belle Isle," connected with the mainland by a bridge, was piled with old lumber and "scantlings" among which the children played. The bridge washed away in the big flood of 1880.

"It was down here when the neighborhood gang went fishing that our Maude Brundage hooked Celia Emmons just under the eyes," said Wood. "And instead of cutting the line, the whole gang, crying loud and long, led Celia home."

MRS. LANG'S GIFT

Why your lawn is so pretty

Then there was the "woman named Lang" who lived "on the hill just this side of the Emmons home." Returning from a visit to Maine, she brought dandelion seeds and planted them "on the side hill," because they looked so bright and cheerful, "and we can well believe they did, and they have certainly multiplied a hundred fold until they cover the land round about."

Mrs. Lang's dandelions are no longer much appreciated. We favor the lilacs, budding fragrantly—a sesquicentennial or so after Wood brought them.

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LOCAL HISTORY QUIZ

Here are some place names, all from this area. Read through them and see how many you can assign a location to. The answers appear below.

1. Cranberry Street.
2. High Street
3. Worden Track
4. Arpin Creek.
5. Mentone
6. Worden Siding.
7. The "Car Barn".
8. Frenchtown.
9. Hurley Town
10. Hobo Jungle
11. Market Square.
12. Bender's Quarry
13. The "Sugar Bowl".
14. Palace Theater.
15. "Teacher's college"
16. Whitney Rapids
17. Plank Hill
18. Pilot Rock (or Sherman Rock)
19. Lyon's Rapids.
20. Herchleb's Pond.

1. West Grand Avenue was originally named Cranberry Street. It was a dirt road at that time.

2. High Street was the street that the museum is located on or Third Street as we recognize it as today. Whether it was called High Street because of its location above the river or because it was the location of many of Grand Rapids' more prominent families is not clear.

3. Worden Track was a park and horse trotting circle that was located in what is now Whitter Field.

4. Arpin Creek is now confined to sewer pipes but it originated in the vicinity of the Green Bay and Western Railroad tracks on the East side of Wisconsin Rapids, flowed south behind the Christian Science Church and emptied into the river just down river a few feet from the Jackson Street bridge.

5. Mentone was a side track and flag stop on the Green Bay and Western Railroad in the cranberry growing area west of the city. It was primarily a shipping point for cranberries.

6. Worden Siding was a flag stop and railroad siding located on the railroad track to Rudolph. It was there for the shipping of stone from the Worden stone quarry located nearby.

7. The "Car Barn" was a large brick building that was located on the river bank, between the river and the highway just south of the Express Way bridge. It was the garage for storing the streetcars. For many years, it was used as a city garage when streetcars no longer served this area.

8. Frenchtown is what Port Edwards was called before the name was officially changed to Port Edwards. It was so called because of the prevalence of the French people that lived there.

9. Hurleytown was the area that surrounded the Centralia Hydroelectric plant. It was so called because of the Hurley and Burns sawmill that was located on the river where the electric plant is today.

10. Hobo Jungle was a bum's campground in summer time where bums and hobos would camp. It was located just at the north city limits along the railroad track, and to the west of present Highway 34.

11. Market Square was popular on weekends for the purchase of produce, crafts, dairy products etc. The site today is pretty much taken up by streets, lawns and sidewalks in front of the county court house.

12. Bender's Quarry was a stone quarry that supplied building stone. It was located in a small hill west of Wisconsin Rapids, on George Road, not too far from the present Gluee Ford garage.

13. The "Sugar Bowl" was a restaurant that specialized in home made candy. It was located across the street from Wood County National Bank.

14. Palace Theater is the present DeByle's clothing store. Entrance to the popular theater was via an entrance that fronted on Third Avenue.

15. The "Teachers' College" was officially known as Wood County Normal School and it was located adjacent to the present Lincoln Junior High School.

16. Whitney Rapids was an outcropping in the Wisconsin River that started in the vicinity of the Nekoosa city park and ran down river to below the Nekoosa dam. They are covered by backwater from the Nekoosa dam today.

17. Plank Hill was located on a dirt road south of Nekoosa about three or four miles. The road went up the hill and because of the sandy condition of the road, the right side was covered with wooden planks to avoid getting stuck in the loose sand. It's backtop today.

18. Pilot Rock or Sherman Rock is still there today and is that large rock in the river just below the Wisconsin Rapids Dam in the vicinity of the Bell tower. Thede Brazeau recalls spending a day on that rock in his childhood. We will tell you about that in some future issue.

19. Lyon's Rapids was the rock stretch of the river that is still visible between the Northland Cranberry office and the Expressway bridge, along First Avenue.

20. Herschleb's Pond was an enlargement of Arpin Creek and located behind the Christian Science Church..

Most of the above taken from a booklet entitled WOOD COUNTY PLACE NAMES by Robert S. Rudolph.

How did you do on the quiz?

Membership monies were due March 1997. If you forgot please use the form below and mail to the Museum Office.

Name _____

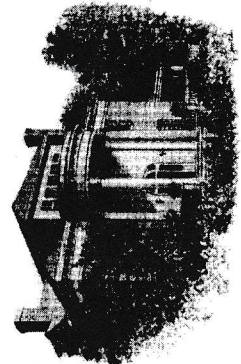
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THEDE BRAZEAU'S COMMENTS

A transcription of Thede Brazeau's recollections taped for South Wood County Historical Corp. Continued.

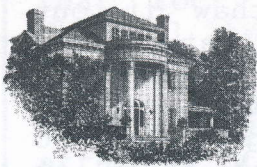
"The home itself, and ours was a typical home of a family that lived in Wisconsin Rapids

at that time. We had a wood stove and we would pile up the wood behind the stove, piling it up in the evening to keep the stove going all night so the house might stay warm. It didn't keep it very warm- everything froze up anyway. But we had a wood stove. Coal stoves came a little later and were only in the homes of some of those families that were well off. Most people had just what we had, a wood stove."

"We had a pump in the yard and it was a wooden pump. That was where we had to go out doors to get our water. Summer and winter. And in the nights when it was cold, we would go out and wrap blankets around the pump, all the way down to keep it from being frozen in the morning. And sometimes that didn't keep it from freezing and in the morning we would have to thaw it out by pouring boiling water down the pump."

"I remember that pump of ours. The one thing I had to do was wash my feet there at night when I was a boy and the water was awfully cold. I didn't like to do it but my brother would pump the water and I would put my feet under it and then I would pump and he put his feet under it. Sometimes we would try to sneak into bed without washing our feet and we were hauled out of bed and sent outdoors at night to have the cold water pumped on our feet before we went back to bed."

More Next Issue.



**SOUTH WOOD COUNTY
HISTORICAL CORPORATION**

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