

SOUTH WOOD COUNTY HISTORICAL CORPORATION

ARTIFACTS

Volume *Three*

Early Winter 1998

The winter holidays are near and the Museum is decorated to welcome them. We've enjoyed a wondrous and special sesquicentennial year with musical entertainment, new exhibits and craft demonstrations. The grounds are lovely thanks to the hard work of local Master Gardeners under the tutelage of Joy Close. Wreaths, trees, and boughs now serve as a harbinger to winter snow and the Christmas season. We have much to be thankful for.

The Museum calendar has been extended to include our first holiday gift shop endeavor. Carole and Karen have been shopping and decorating the first floor in preparation for a unique holiday shopping. We have stretched ourselves in another direction that we think the public will enjoy.

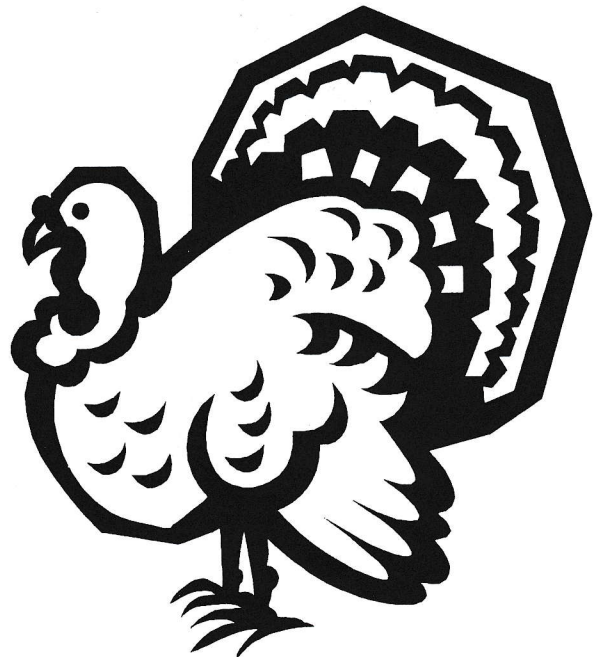
We are also preparing for our annual fund raising campaign. We will be focusing on a strategy to repair the front porch and address the condition of the storm windows that continue to fall apart.

I am thankful for the continued support of our membership, my loyal staff and volunteers who are always available, and the Board of Directors who maintain a vision of providing local history experiences for the community and visitors.

May your holidays^{be} filled with memories and merriment.....

Best wishes to all,

Pam Walker,
Museum Director





THEDE'S MEMORIES

(A question and answer interview with pioneer attorney, Theodore Brazeau.)

Q: "Tell us a little more about this compensation act. Which groups were in favor of it and who opposed it?"

A: "Yes, I can tell you all about it. When I introduced the Workman's Compensation Act, it was an astounding blow to the LaFollett element in the state legislature, as it took the wind out of their sail as the great friend of the laboring man. And they did not do me the honor of putting me on the committee to consider it but instead removed me from the committee. And after that they fed the press with the idea that they were the ones to introduce the bill. As I remember it, it was bill 381S and can be still checked out. In framing this act, I consulted with Justice Marshall of the Supreme Court and he mentions that in his autobiography. I also consulted frequently with a young man in the Labor Department who was very helpful and did a great deal in putting the law together in its final form. And we worked together very harmoniously to the end to get a just and workable constitutional act."

"In introducing this bill I of course came into immediate contact with employers all over the state. I went around in various places, particularly Wausau, Wis., where there was a big meeting of employers and explained the old law as it existed at that time.

I explained the act that I had introduced and the fairness and justice of it. It was accepted by them and endorsed by them. I went to Milwaukee and addressed the industrial committee there of the employers and met with a very fine reception. And they endorsed the act. Employers generally, throughout the state favored the act. No one on their behalf appeared against it."

When it finally passed, there was only one vote against the bill in both houses and that was from Senator Whitehead of Janseville, Wis. So it passed almost unanimously with the assistance of the employers.

The employers also sent attorneys and representatives to the various meetings of the committee that was considering the bill and they made helpful suggestions."

"The opposition attempted to frame up and have since on numerous occasions referred to the LaFolletts having promoted this bill against the employers of the state which is absolutely untrue."

Q:"What was the basis of the opposition? Did Senator Whitehead favor the opposition group?"

A: Oh Whitehead was a notorious conservative , and he opposed everything that changed anything on general principal. He thought it was going to ruin industry and be so expensive that they couldn't operate , and a whole lot of objections of various kinds. Also, he claimed, and justly in that respect, that there would be a great deal of malingering, and there was. And the radical group fought hard to prevent any

provision in the bill that would head off malingering on the part of the employee."

Q:"How did the insurance companies stand on this ?"

A: "The insurance companies favored it."

Q: "Was there any opposition at all from labor?"

A: No, there was no opposition from labor except to get the bill more radical and get bigger allowances. But generally labor favored it."

Q:"What year was this?"

A:" The bill was initiated in 1909 and passed in 1911. It was two years in committee."



River City 1848: Village on the Rapids

By Dave Engel

River City Municipal Historian

In view of the rising timber trade, Grand Rapids is the worst rapids, all things considered, on the entire Wisconsin River.

So says one who should know, A.G. Ellis, Stevens Point land agent, who describes the succession of rapids and eddies. "Most of the former surge over rocky bottoms, with a wild current of ten to twenty miles an hour, the channel broken and divided, offering almost insurmountable obstacles to anything like navigation: yet over all these the lumber has to pass."

Owing its existence to the sometimes frightful waterfall, a fine town springs up, with numerous mills and dams servicing the extensive lumbering establishments of the vicinity. The lumber mills, in turn, furnish materials "for improving and rendering habitable the immense prairie worlds of Illinois, Iowa and Missouri."

"It is frequently observed that the timber will soon be exhausted," observes Ellis. "That it must finally fail, is of course certain; but that period is so remote as to have no practical bearing on the investment of capital for present operations."

FIRST SURVEY

A federal government survey begun in 1839 and completed in 1851 finds a succession of rapids and chutes called

the "Grand" rapids with two extensive lumbering establishments owned by Bloomer, Chamberlain, Adams, Strong, Hill & others. The hydraulic power is capable of being increased substantially, according to the surveyors.

In the village are a double log house, a single log house, a shingle factory, a blacksmith shop, a stable and a barn.

By the time the survey is completed, the several pine groves earlier noted are gone. In fact, there is little pine left in the township. The surveyor, Erskine Stansbury, finds tamarack, aspen, oak, maple and jack pine.

Much of the land has been burned over. To the south are jack pine barrens; to the north, wild cranberry marsh. "There is hardly any good land in this township," he concludes.

PINERY TRAFFIC

After Wisconsin becomes a territory in 1836, the number of immigrants from more populated places such as Illinois, New York, Quebec and England increases year by year as travelers struggle up rivers or over primitive roads. Supplies are hauled by wagon from Galena, Ill., a distance of 235 miles. By ox team, it's a three-week trip.

A census taken in 1846 shows a population of 147, of which 130 are

males. Among the early land buyers are Robert Bloomer, Henry Merrill, Daniel Whitney, Jesse Heldin, Samuel Merrill, William Naylor, Robert Wakely, Francis Biron, George Klein, Orestes Garrison and Thomas Byrnes. Joseph Wood, for whom the county is named, arrives in 1848.

The first land is platted for development the following year. By 1848, a number of frame and log houses have been built and Grand Rapids assumes the appearance of a young, busy, thriving, growing village.

MCCUTCHEON

According to the *History of Wood County*, the first house in Grand Rapids is built by Hugh McCutcheon, a cook for the Strong & Bloomer lumber company. McCutcheon's daughter, Mrs. S.J. Yarker, later described fires glimmering in the dark woods and nights "made hideous by the howling of wolves, the barking of Indian dogs and the hooting of Indians and owls."

Some, like the McCutcheons, arrive expecting to find accustomed aspects of civilization such as railroads and boats. They ask Robert Bloomer where his famous railroad is, with the cars that are said to run regularly every day. He takes them out on a lane cut through the pines and points to the railroad: wooden rails servicing a wooden car for the purpose of carrying logs to a mill. The only boats are keel boats that come up the river when the water is high.

A WALK WITH CAPT. COTEY

Downtown Grand Rapids, according to one of the early arrivals, Capt. Joseph L. Cotey, is an island approached on the

south by crossing a slab bridge over a slough. The dozen or so frame buildings begin with the Wisconsin Hotel of Nelson Strong, builder of one of the first sawmills; his wife was the first white woman to arrive.

Next, is the general store of E.S. Miner and John Warner, a good source for Dr. Jayne's patent medicines. Miner is the first postmaster; mail arrives once a week by stage coach and amounts to a dozen or so letters and newspapers. In front of the building, a fine row of pine trees add to charm of the new village.

Further along the way are: the house of A.B. Sampson, manager of the Wisconsin Hotel. The house of Tim Hurley, a lumberman; Mr. Sampson's barn; the Miner house; a "ball alley" built by Sampson and Strong; Francis Biron's supply store at the fork of Water Street and Court House Street (now First Street North and Baker Street); J.B. Hasbrouck's blacksmith shop.

Continuing up the east river bank: On a little plateau by the Congregational Church are the remains of an old log shanty left by a fur trader.

On the "hill" behind, owned by Maxime LaBreche and Homer Drake, is a two-story boarding house and "grocery," meaning tavern. A favorite beverage is Goodhue's Best, a rotgut whisky from Goodhue's distillery on the Rock River. At that time, there are few able pinery men who do not carry a little brown jug. A ball alley is attached to the "grocery."

On the corner of Drake and Water street is the frame house of Frank Degarette and E. Anthony. Then, a log house for mill men and lodgers and another for the laborers. Across Water

Street on the riverbank is the Clinton saw mill (where the swimming pool would later be).

Next is Martin Herrin's shingle shanty (near 1998's SS. Peter and Paul Catholic church). The long log house of George Neeves and William Roe, who are logging for the Clinton Mill, marks the north end of the village.

Most locals find their way up the hill by way of a convenient ravine. Here (off later 7th Street North) can be seen two graves, that of a Mr. LesLond and that of a canoeist for Rev. Bishop Lavenchey, who was paddling up to the Apostle Islands. The little graveyard is officially blessed, and used until 1849, when J.J. Cruickshank donates an acre further east. The first burial at the Cruickshank cemetery is that of H.T. Johnson, fatally stabbed by a jealous rival.

On the hill, the large log house of Francis Lemise is a stopping place for travelers on their way up the river to Stevens Point, Little and Big Bull.

WEST SIDE STORY

Across the river on the west side, is a smaller, nameless settlement. There is no bridge and no sanctioned ferry service, although boats travel back and forth; in dry seasons it is possible to walk across.

The west side sawmill has been run for a decade by George Kline, Sr. His son George Kline, Jr., arrives about 1838 and works for Strong & Bloomer across the river. His marriage to David Whitney's widow, Maria, is the first in town. Kline, Jr. departs for the 1849 gold rush and does not return.

There are three frame houses for mill owners and workers. There are also two shingle shanties and a "block house," built by David Baker, who had married

Elizabeth Kline. Their son, George Baker, is the first white child born in the twin villages.

In 1842, Rev. J.S. Hurlbut, a Methodist missionary, holds a meeting in a log house in Centralia and establishes the first school in the county with himself as teacher.

CUTTING MARSH

Cutting Marsh, a Congregational preacher, visits and finds two sawmills working. He says three million board feet of lumber were sawn in a year. The fifteen thousand bushels of cranberries gathered the previous year are considered a poor crop.

In the area, he counts 23 families and between 100 and 300 people, depending on the season. He says 75 votes are polled in the 1848 election in which Zachary Taylor is elected president and Millard Fillmore vice president.

Marsh stays with E.S. Miner, son of Jesse Miner, who had preceded Marsh as missionary to the Stockbridge Indians. He also calls on "Old Mr. Klyne's family. Himself once a Methodist professor but not an intemperate man."

Marsh addresses a small group of Grand Rapids residents from John 8:53, to which he says serious attention is paid. There are few females present. Another time, he preaches from Hebrews 3: 7-8. He hands out religious tracts.

He notes that there is no day school and no Sabbath school and that the Roman Catholics are building a church on the west side of the river. George Neeves wants to start a school, says Marsh. Neeves pledges two dollars per week and travel expenses for a teacher.

Marsh visits with Neeves and Mr. Searls, the son-in-law of Mr. Klyne. He

also visits Mr. Warner, a member of the Methodist church in the state of New York "who makes no pretensions to religion here."

Despite scant success at missionary work, Marsh says Grand Rapids is a very "romantic" place.

According to Marsh, the name of the Wisconsin river means, in the native tongue, "bladder that never runs dry."

WHAT THE CENSUS SAYS

The 1850 census lists fifteen notable property owners, headed by Robert Wakely, \$3,000; Francis Biron, \$2,000; J.H. Compton, \$2,000; H. Clinton, \$2,000; M. Labruche, \$1,000; William Roe, \$1,000; A. Anthony, \$1,000.

Of 342 residents, 149 are between the ages of 20 and 29. There are 46 children under the age of ten. Only four residents are over 60, the oldest being an 85-year-old Canadian, P. Tebo.

There are 266 males and 76 females.

Eighteen lumbermen employ 200 laborers, predominantly sawmill workers, lumberjacks and rafters.

Serving other occupations are the five blacksmiths, five carpenters, two merchants, two tavern keepers, two millrights and one shoemaker. Two farmers are counted.

A total of seven children attend school. Of the adults, 63 are termed illiterate.

Most of the new settlers come from the eastern states or Canada. A significant number are from Great Britain or Illinois. Only 38 were born in Wisconsin.

THE ACCOUNT OF LEM KROMER

Coming up from Mineral Point in a wagon loaded with pork, whiskey, flour

and groceries, Lem Kromer comes in 1845 to work as a cook. Grand Rapids consists of a sawmill, a boarding shanty and a tavern kept by Sampson and Strong, all surrounded by tall pines and hemlocks.

The inhabitants are mostly French and Indians. There are two white women, Mrs. Sampson and Mrs. Strong.

After cooking at a Mill Creek lumber camp, Kromer returns to work at Mrs. Sampson's. In spring, men come out of the woods "and we were soon overflowing with them feeding as many as 100 at each meal. It was considered a poor day when not more than four or five fights were had. I have known of not less than twenty in one day."

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

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

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

In time, Lem Kromer becomes a merchant, clerk of court and registrar of deeds.

In a demonstration of frontier poetic justice, Ben Buck becomes Wood County's first sheriff.

CONGRATULATIONS YMCA!

Forty years ago, on a Sunday afternoon in July, the John Alexander YMCA Community Center in Port Edwards was dedicated. The one and a half million dollar building was the idea of John Alexander, president of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company.

But the roots of the Port Edwards YMCA go back another eighteen years to 1940 when Alexander had another idea which would benefit the youth of Port Edwards. In that year, he organized a committee of local men and women and assigned them the task of forming a Port Edwards Boys' Club.

The task was consummated in the summer of 1941 when a local teacher was hired for the season as the Boys' Club Director. The boys met in the Port Edwards school where access to the gym provided a rainy day activity center; the industrial arts room, where crafts could be developed; and the typing room, where the weekly newspaper could be published.

The club's program consisted of working in the morning and playing in the afternoon. Work consisted of hiring out for odd jobs, lawn work, writing the weekly newspaper, and gardening in the club's bean patch. The bean patch was a half city block devoted to the cultivation of green beans which were sold to Sampson Canning Company.. The garden was located on the corner of Third and Verbunker streets in Port Edwards.

Working on club projects entitled one to attend the

Boys' Club Camp at Nepco Lake for a week or two during the following summer. The camp originally had four sleeping cabins and a native pine log lodge and dinning hall. The motto of the boys was, "No Work--No Play".

The program was funded by Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company and John Alexander.

But alas, the club catered to boys only and to Port Edwards boys at that. Accordingly, the following year similar programs were offered to young girls of Port Edwards as well as to the youth of Nekoosa. Financing was now a joint effort of the Nekoosa Edwards Foundation and the respective communities.

Then in 1956 John Alexander organized another committee. This group was charged with the design and construction of a community center at Port Edwards, to be associated with the YMCA. The committee welcomed their assignment and only eighteen months later the beautiful, functional, stone edifice was completed.

A gymnasium, public restaurant, youth lounge, swimming pool, and several meeting rooms were incorporated into the scheme of the building. Even a sixteen millimeter carbon arc movie projector was included in the large meeting room; somewhat of a rarity.

Upon completion of the YMCA, the Boys' and Girls' clubs were dissolved and the YMCA took over the youth programs in the communities of Port Edwards and Nekoosa as well as the adjoining communities.. What was originally a summer only program now was a year round

activity.

Hats off to the YMCA and John Alexander on the Y's 40th birthday.



JOHN E. ALEXANDER
President
South Wood County
YMCA
Community Center

TO THE CITIZENS OF SOUTH WOOD COUNTY:

On behalf of the board of directors of the YMCA and the Nekoosa-Edwards Foundation, I express our sincere appreciation for your loyal and steadfast support which has made possible this fine community center.

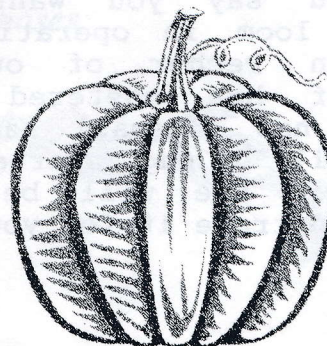
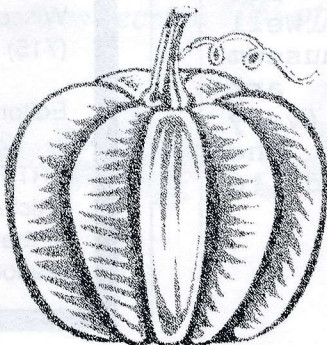
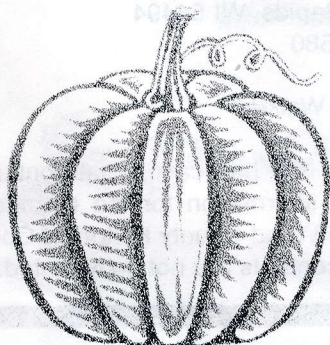
The building that stands here today is the culmination of a 10-year-old dream I shared with many others in this area — a dream that, together we might some day provide organized facilities which we felt were needed to serve boys, girls, men and women in our community. I think you'll agree that the building we dedicate today will meet those needs, offering many new facilities and programs for all ages, 9 to 90.

My experience has taught me two things: to really do a job in community improvement you have to live it body and soul — you can't give just half of your mind to the task. The other thing is this: to be successful, any community program must reach ALL the people, all denominations and ages, and must offer something worthwhile to all groups regardless of position, wealth or social level. These feelings have guided my efforts and those of many others who have devoted their untiring efforts in making a community center a reality.

I can only hope with all my heart that this spirit will be carried on by those who will be working together in the years ahead to make our YMCA a living part of our beloved community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. E. Alexander", written in a cursive style.



THE RUG LOOM WORKS!

After being idle for many years , resting in the basement of its former owner, George Swarick, and then in the basement of the museum for a few additional years the loom is once again operational on the first floor gallery of the museum.

The loom is a hand built piece of equipment that is well over a hundred years old. Mrs. Swarick used to weave rugs on the loom. Then it was given to the museum. The loom was photographed as it stood in Mr. Swarick's basement and these photos became the blueprints for reassembling it in the museum.

Thanks to the efforts of Ryan Walker and some local rug weavers, the loom is in operating condition and is a center piece of the "Stitches in Time" display currently featured at the museum.

Other items in the display include rug hooking, wool spinning, quilting and other home fabric crafts. Children especially find it fun to make a quilt patch of their own design, using cloth remnants furnished by the museum . To facilitate their efforts, they glue the patterns onto the backing rather than sew them on.

You say you want to see the loom in operation? Well Karen Pecher of our museum staff has mastered the art and has a small sample, (very small) rug started on the loom. She will be glad to demonstrate it for you.

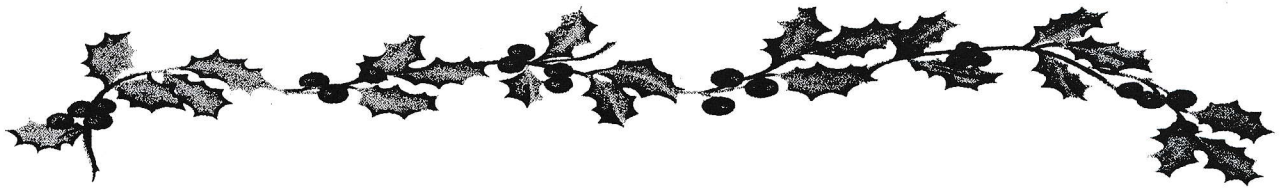


ARTIFACTS

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Editor: Pam Walker

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*Unique Gifts and Treasures of Central Wisconsin for
Christmas '98*

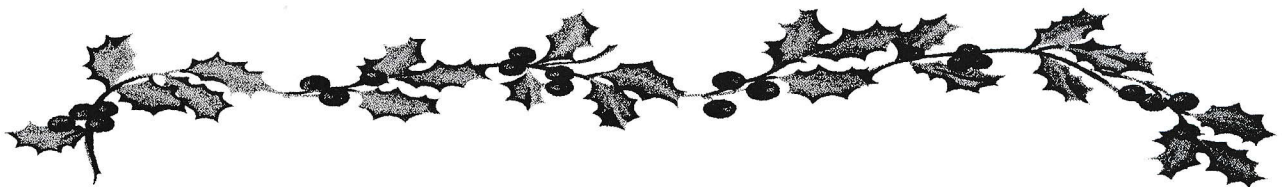
Holiday Museum Gift Shop Spectacular

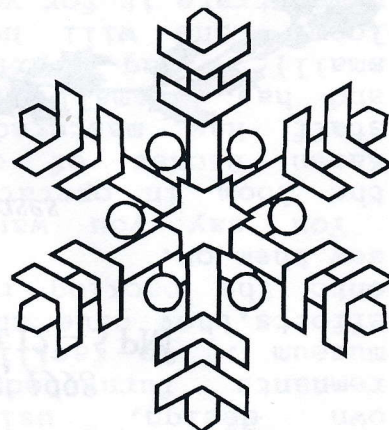
*Victorian Christmas Items, Toys, Books,
Sesquicentennial Memorabilia, Cranberry Glass, &
Paul Gross's new video: The History of Wisconsin Rapids
After the War- Part 1 The West Side.*

Open Weekends beginning Saturday November 21st

Museum Gift Shop Hours until December 13, 1998
Friday 3 – 8 PM, Saturday 12 – 5 PM, Sunday 12 – 5 PM

Museum Members receive 10% off purchases





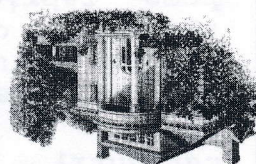
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