

# ARTIFACTS

Volume 2001.2

Summer

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*Featuring the Madison Brass*



Sunday, July 15, 2001

Performances at 1:30 and 3:00pm

*Refreshments served*



## River City Memoirs

# Summer Help Working in the Mill

By Dave Engel  
Municipal Historian

Not just the Mead family relied on their home town company.

The lives of thousands were defined by their connection with Consolidated Papers, Inc., Wisconsin Rapids.

There were individual shareholders whose quality of life depended on the local firm; institutions that thrived on donated Consolidated stock; workers who kept the big wheels turning; families that enjoyed good wages and health care; retirees collecting generous pensions; and college students who could earn enough as "summer help" to pay for their winter schooling.

### Open House

Do you know where your Consolidated spruce is growing, 46 years later? A lot of your neighbors do.

In May 1954, when Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. opened its doors to mark half-a-century of papermaking, most of the 15,000 visitors received a free four-year-old spruce tree.

In 1954, Bill and Viola Mumford, owners of a West Side grocery store, purchased the land I now own and planted

one of those Consolidated trees. It's now bigger than the northwoods specimens shipped to the White House at Christmas.

### Work, By Golly

The first to register for the 1954 tour was Oswald P. Menzel, 82, a prominent local photographer.

Another old timer present: Edward A. Witt, employed by Consolidated since its first year of operation. At age 71, the machine-tender on #2 machine still liked to work, "by golly," and had no plans to retire. Only G.W. Mead himself had been with the company longer.

Witt said Consolidated had always been an aggressive organization, leading in the conversion from steam to electricity for machine operation. The biggest change, he said, was from newsprint to coated paper through the Thiele-Massey-Rapraeger coating process.

Among the 15,000 was a nine-year-old boy, holding a tiny tree and gawking at the spinning dryer drums—not realizing he was looking at and smelling the revolutionary Massey on-machine coaters. Not knowing that a few years later, continuing a Rapids tradition, he would take his place on the hot seat by these same machines that chewed up grown Christmas trees and spit out top-shelf coated-enamel River City history.

### Quality Time

My dad, a welder and financial secretary of the local Machinists union, reluctantly observed the strikes of 1956-57.

While out of work, he cleared brush at what would later become the Ridges golf course. The part-time job came courtesy of the developers, our neighbors across Two Mile Avenue, John and Auril Murgatroyd.

My dad liked to build a fire and throw in potatoes wrapped in tinfoil and that's what

we did on the ice at what we called "the Four Mile" during the strike.

### The Three Musicians

Consolidated had begun making plastic laminate in 1943 for military uses. "Consoweld" was made from sheets of the heavy brown Kraft paper bathed in resin and pressed together in huge presses.

In 1963, a newspaper featured a "new art form" on display for the first time. Consoweld employee Gilbert Endrizzi, a company designer for 15 years, had fashioned elaborate mosaics using Consoweld plastic laminate.

"Most striking, perhaps, are the reproductions of Pablo Picasso's two versions of "The Three Musicians," said the *Tribune*.

That year, 1963, "Gib," who lived on the east bank of the One Mile creek as he still does, was neighbor to my family. He was the only artist around.

Last year, as a memorial to my mother, I bought one of Gib's works at the Rapids Episcopal church: a striking interpretation in colorful chips of Consoweld, entitled "The Three Musicians."

### Coater Boy

In 1964, CPI made the list of top 500 industries in the Fortune Directory, based on total sales. It was number 499.

That was the year I punched in as "summer help" or "vacation relief."

I began as a "Coater Boy," high on the scale for summer help but the lowest and weakest link of the paper machine crew.

It was difficult to stay awake between midnight and dawn, seated on an elevated bench in 107-degree temperatures, staring at a mirror that reflected bubbling white coating in a trough between two rolls as wide as the sheet of paper.

Someone said the smell was formaldehyde. It made my eyes water.

A painful aspect of my job was to snap paper samples from the edge of the great sheet and to help with the Niagara of hot parchment that cascaded onto the machinery after a break. The was more often than not caused by me, since I didn't quite master one job before I was transferred to another.

Each machine had its own story:

- "5", the Life Magazine machine, big and fast and clean;

- "4", the former biggest and still fast by sixties standards;

- "1" and "2", side-by-side small and old historic machines;

- "3", a brown-paper maker that had no coater so I didn't work on it, although I strolled by many times in the wee hours and enjoyed its riverside ambience.

For several weeks, I hated the mill and had nightmares about it: the smell, heat, paper-sliced fingers, whirling knives, deep, dark pits, the dream everyone seemed to have of the lights going out. How could you ever find your way? I needed a map to get to my first job.

After a variety of assignments in which I was able to explore most of the territory, I came to enjoy many moments "at work." It was also a good feeling to swagger into Buzz's Bar on a hot summer night with more-or-less honest sweat on my brow and Consolidated silver in my pocket.

### Y2K

There was a real sense of history down along the machines and below them too, in the old beater rooms and broke holds, the grinders and hot ponds. But no year was more historic than 2000, when Consolidated was sold to a multi-national company.

In the *Daily Tribune* of Thursday, October 26, 2000, it was announced that #15 paper machine would be retired permanently



by its new owner, Stora Enso North America.

The 63-year-old "veteran" machine, installed to create a medium for *Life* and *Time* magazines, was inefficient by modern standards.

The slogan so closely associated with this venerable appliance?

"Built for Life Operated for Life."

Fittingly enough, *Life* as we knew it is dead and so is Number Five.

### Blade Coater

In the early 1960s, "blade coaters" were installed at Whiting, Biron and Rapids, bringing to the public another paper industry term, like *Fourdrinier* and Kraft that hardly anyone understands and that instantly sends many readers into a deep trance.

The blade coater rested on piers over the Wisconsin River in a structure equivalent in height to a five-story building. The company name was affixed to the exterior as part of new policy of identifying "plants."

With the possible exception of a woozy morning hanging on to an air hammer inside a boiler, my worst moment in the mill may have been caused by the blade coater.

That day, I was assigned to move rolls of paper weighing tons of tons from one place to another on racks that extended to the ceiling. The tool was a crane-hook that hung from the ceiling and a control box with buttons on it that was placed in my hands.

Soon, one of those rolls began swinging back and forth far above me and, yes, I pictured it and some part of my future crashing through the new windows of Consolidated into the world's hardest working river.

### It was a very good year

Despite having me for an employee, CPI president Stanton W. Mead reported that

sales for 1964 were at record levels of \$95 million. Consolidated ranked first in the nation in enamel paper production.

The company owned or controlled 650,000 acres of timberlands and employed 4,424.

Wages salaries and benefits in 1964: \$31.5 million.

My own wages were a generous \$2.22 per hour. At Sampson's canning company, I had made \$1.05 per.

### 1966

New CPI President George W. Mead II said 1966 looked even better than 1965.

L.W. Murtfeldt, vice president of manufacturing, announced the company's first process computer would be installed on a paper machine at Wisconsin Rapids Division. A new data processing center on Third Avenue North would accommodate a larger computer system.

Consolidated was looking toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century but I seemed to walk back into the 19<sup>th</sup>.

### The Woodroom

In 1955, a new "wood room" had been built, in which logs were debarked, sorted and chipped. My second summer in the mill was spent there. It seemed primitive.

Sometimes, I hauled falling bark that accumulated in odd places along conveyors and bins, a true mill rat going about his business in grease, slime, dripping water, rotting bark and oil. I enjoyed it.

But soon I went upstairs where the action was. The logs tumbled out of two "drum barkers" onto a sorting belt. It was our job to pull off the logs that still had bark attached. Not so easy.

You could stick your hookaroon into a big hemlock. Get pulled out of your seat; have your arm pulled out of its socket; or let



go and enjoy semi-good natured harassment as the machinery stopped and the implement was retrieved.

Or consider your own body lying on the belt like a log until it is sucked into the chipper that in seconds cuts 8-foot logs into 3/4-inch chips via twelve 30-inch knives: ka-whang!

The chips moved to 5-story-high bins then were lifted on a 390-foot conveyor belt through a long silver tube to the sulfite plant.

Paul Miller and I liked to walk up that tube alongside the ascending stream of sweet-smelling wood chips. At the roof, we enjoyed a fine view of the sun coming up over downtown River City.

### The Good News

In 1966, ground was broken for the largest expenditure in company history: a Kraft mill and power plant that occupied 80 acres and would supply pulp to four Consolidated mills.

That the Kraft mill hadn't been built somewhere else represented a commitment to the area. "Wisconsin and South Wood County are, for us, a pretty good place to do business," said George W. Mead II, "youthful company president."

### The Bad News

Mead noted that a Kraft mill is known for its odor. CPI would employ the best control devices available but...

As the Sixties came to a close, some residents raised a stink about the stench, especially those west of 4<sup>th</sup> Ave North; in the downtown area; and directly across the river. It was getting tiresome hearing the whiff of rotten eggs called "the smell of money."

The city Redevelopment authority in 1969 designated a residential area along 4<sup>th</sup>

Avenue North one of the first to undergo "renewal," making at least 44 former homes disappear.

### More Good News

The now-replaced sulfite mill was razed in 1968. Formerly considering the river a lethal liquid, residents were amazed to find, after the Kraft mill, fisher people plying their rods in scenic pools just a few hundred yards below the dam.

### Time Capsule

The completed Kraft mill held a time capsule containing predictions for the state of the graphic arts industry in the year 2000. It was to be opened on September 26 of that year and its contents published.

So it was that, November 6, 2000, I called Scott Deitz at Stora Enso public relations. I was going to tell him he forgot the time capsule.

But by one of those rare coincidences, Deitz was on his way to a ceremony that very morning in which the selfsame historical enclosure would be opened.

Here is one capsule prediction of many, from Norman T. Ohr at Medical Economics, Inc., New Jersey:

"The greatest change that will come about is the transmission of information which can be reproduced many miles away through the air or over wires. This will make it possible for many people to get first-hand reports of events almost as quickly as they are happening. I am not thinking of television..."

Would that be...*the computer?*

Others predicted the electronic age would soon eliminate paper and companies like Consolidated. That makes a lot of sense—so much so that, before I forget, I'm going to print this out and file it for future reference.



# Summer Help

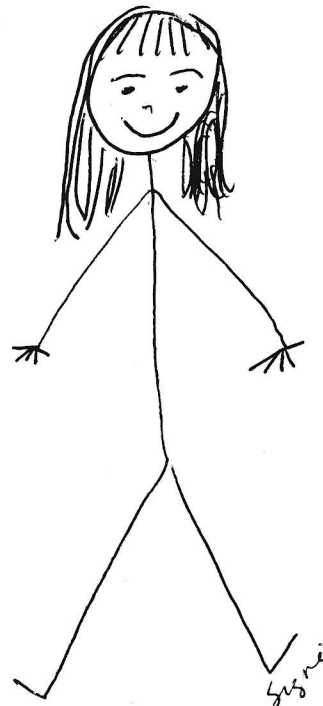
## Working at the Museum

Each summer the South Wood County Historical Museum employs several student assistants. We are pleased to introduce them to you in resumes and pictures they provided themselves. These are the students who meet and greet the visitors, serve up the refreshments while we are entertained by Madison Brass, keep the building in order and organize our collections. They have added a new dimension to our Museum hospitality and continue to provide diverse talents to our presentation of local history. We are always entertained by their sparkling personalities and charmed by the perspectives they offer. Summer season would not be fun without them.



I am Jolene Arnold and I have worked at the museum for three summers. I found out about the job from my sister who also worked here for several summers. I enjoy my job because of the knowledge I gain about the Wisconsin Rapids area. I will begin my senior year at Lincoln High School this fall. After high school I plan to attend a state university and major in natural resources. Besides working at the museum I work at a local restaurant. I'm working the jobs to add to my college fund. When I'm not working I like to spend time with my friends. Sometimes we go to movies, and sometimes a friend and I will go to the humane society and walk dogs.

Jolene





My name is Amy Hall and this is my first summer working at the Museum. In the fall I will be beginning my senior year at Lincoln High School. I love acting and have an increasing passion for art and photography. After I graduate high school I plan to attend college and major in Photography and Theatre, but I have not decided on a university. I decided to work at the Museum because I needed a job with a flexible work schedule. But I also decided to work there because I wanted to learn about the history of the building, and also of Wisconsin.

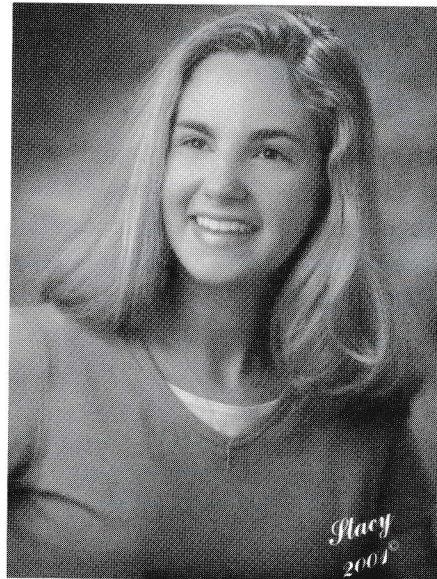
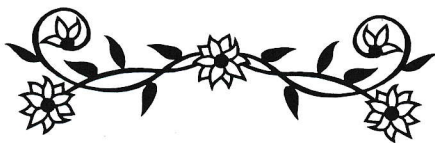
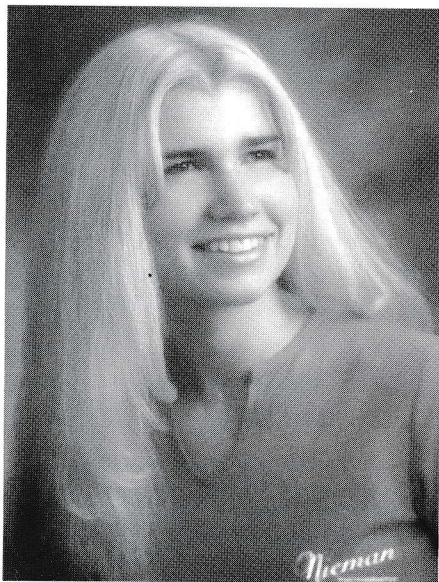
*Amy's favorite singer*



My name is Signe Jorgenson and this is my second year working as a summer assistant for the Museum. I applied for this job because several friends who worked here told me that it was a fun work environment. I was also told that I'd be able to create my own work schedule. I enjoyed my first year with the Museum, so I returned for another year. I graduated from Lincoln High School in 1999 and currently attend the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. I'm pursuing a bachelor of arts in creative writing with a minor in comparative religious studies. I enjoy writing, reading, playing piano, and softball.



My name is Amy Konietzki and this is my first summer working for the museum. I graduated from Assumption High School and will be attending UW La Crosse this fall to major in medicine. During my free time, I enjoy snowboarding and playing basketball. I started working at the museum because I have always had an interest in old buildings, and I want to learn more about our area.



My name is Stacy Lobner and this is my fourth year working at the Museum. I love working at the Museum because of the flexible hours it gives me and the fun and relaxing work environment. I also enjoy working with our archives and talking to our visitors when they come to the Museum. Our local history is very interesting and I learn a lot just by listening to people who have lived here all their lives. I just graduated from Assumption High School and I plan on attending the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in the fall of 2001, but I have not yet decided on a specific major. In my spare time, I enjoy being outdoors, watching movies, reading and spending time with my friends.

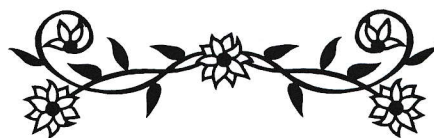




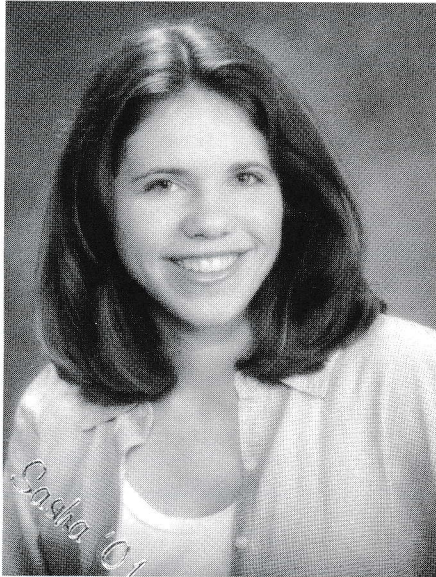
My name is Katie Milkey and I have been working as a summer Assistant at the Museum for three years. I applied at the Museum because I wished to learn more about the history of Wisconsin Rapids, as well as to help other people learn and understand this history. I am a graduate of the Lincoln High School Class of 2001, and will be attending the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in the fall. At UWSP, my goal is to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree in two-dimensional art. I enjoy watching movies, writing, photography, and spending time with friends and family.



My name is Jill Sabo and this is my second year working at the museum. I applied to this job because of the flexible schedule and the friendly working environment. Working at the museum has given me the opportunity to interact with the community, learn more about our city, and save money for college. I graduated from Assumption High School and will be attending UW-Eau Claire this fall. I will be majoring in communications. My interests are dancing, swimming, eating, playing tennis, and hanging out with friends.







Hi, my name is Sasha Straub. I just graduated from Assumption High School and will be attending UW-La Crosse next year to major in Business. This is my second summer working for the museum. I started working at the museum because the flexible hours let me work my schedule around my other jobs and also because I enjoy learning the histories of Wisconsin Rapids and its prestigious families. During my free time, I enjoy reading, friends, biking, basketball, and other sports.





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If you have a brightly colored sticker near the address label, this will serve as final notice that your membership has expired. Please take a moment to complete the membership application provided and continue the strong community support of local history.

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