

ARTIFACTS

Volume 2002.1

Late Spring

From the Director...

Ah, May... I say this as the daffodils are finally erupting in the front gardens, the lawn has had its first cut and **snow** is predicted for tonight! The Museum is open for the season and ready for visitors to explore our local history riches. School children have been arriving for guided tours as John Billings entertains with his stories of yesteryear.

We will begin some new methods of recording our collection this summer using digital photography. We experimented with this technique last year, but will employ this method to capture small collections available for public "viewing" on a computer. Hopefully this will allow for sneak peeks at artifacts not generally on display.

Our biggest change of the summer will focus on a variety of different program offerings. **The Sunroom** will accommodate the majority of activities as we work on "Wisconsin Hats", mix some tasty strawberry jam and fabricate cornhusk dolls. In addition Marshall Buehler will bring in his collection of steam engines and demonstrate their abilities in July. Visitors may choose to spend time wandering through the exhibits or simply work on a project in the sunroom, or both!

For those watching the front porch area... the railing system returns! Ebel Woodworking of Stevens Point has been contracted to make and install the new railings. The project is schedule for completion in late June – early July. The gardens will be managed by the Master Gardeners of South Wood county under the tutelage of Mary Thiele. We are enchanted by the waves of color that continue to decorate our landscape throughout the seasons and are thankful for their many hours of volunteer work.

The SWCHC Board of Directors has three new faces this year as **Paige Casey Clark, Robert Detlefsen and Caroline Paul** bring talent and vitality to the corporation. Each represents a family of historical significance to the south Wood county area. The next newsletter will provide an introduction to each.

Happy Spring everyone,

Museum Director

A FEW WORDS ABOUT FERRIES

A resident from Nekoosa informed the writer that he is the proud owner of the large wheel that the cable wound around at the Nekoosa upper ferry. It was located on the east side of the river, slightly north of the present bridge. The concrete abutment is still visible on the river bank, near the water's edge. The owner has turned it into a child's merry-go-round. This will indicate the size of the wheel or pool. The Nekoosa upper ferry was propelled by a gasoline engine. In other words, the cable and ferry were moved back and forth across the river by gasoline engine power.

Whether the engine was mounted on the river bank and connected to the pulley wheel or whether the engine was on the ferry and operated a pulley on the ferry which the cable wrapped around I'm not sure. There must be some old timers out there who remember this ferry. Can you help us out?

At Wakley's tavern below Nekoosa was another ferry known as the lower ferry. A depression in the river bank on the west side of the stream is where the road went down the bank to the ferry boat. This ferry was at a location where the river was quite shallow (before the Petenwell Dam) and before a ferry was located there, it was a natural fording place during low river flow.

This ferry was operated by the current of the river



flow. A cable ran from bank to bank, but was wrapped around a pulley on the ferry. the pulley in turn was connected to a water wheel under the ferry. As the current of the water turned the water wheel, it in turn caused the steel cable to wrap around the pulley and slowly move the craft across the stream.

An engineer, I am not but that's the way it was explained to me.

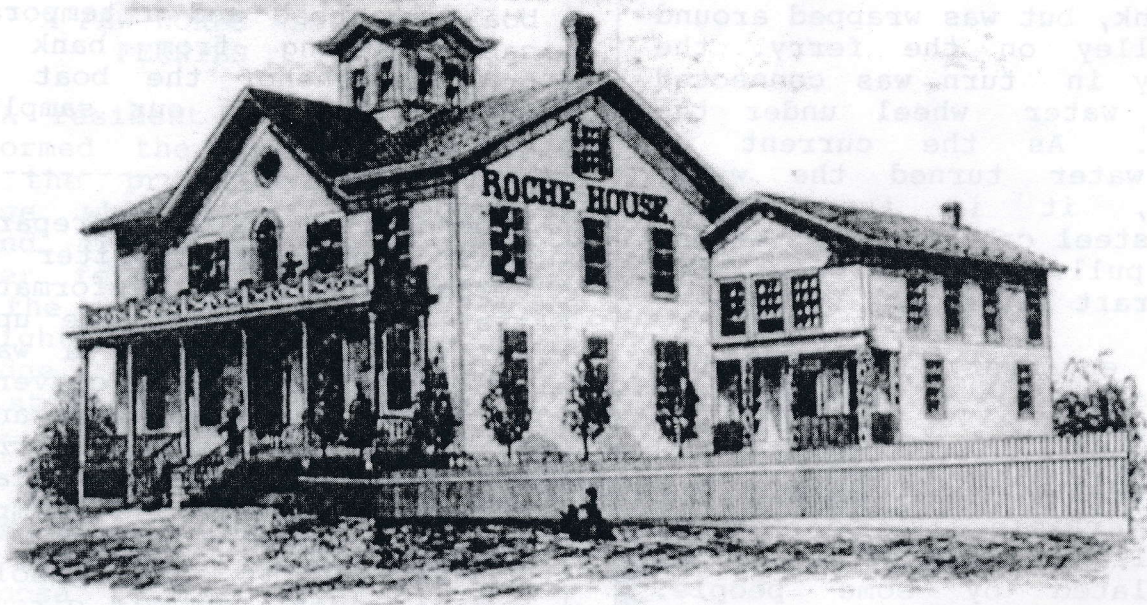
But the real reason for this article is to correct a fallacy that seems to be circulated by some people. They believe that a cable, suspended between two "A" frames on opposite banks of the river and about ten feet above the water was the cable and that the small wooden platform suspended from the cable on two pulley wheels was the ferry. These stories claim that one propelled themselves across the stream by pulling the platform along the cable by hand.

That is partially true as far as method of operation but IT WAS NOT A FERRY. It was built for one person, maybe two at most, and was part of the United States Geological Service river gaging station. Thus it was normally locked to the support and was used to go out into the stream and gage the flow of water in the river. A small sign used to be located on the west side of the river stating that it was a field station of the Geological Service.

The writer was involved in similar work back in the

1950's but at that time, a boat was used and a temporary cable strung from bank to bank to anchor the boat on while conducting our sampling and measuring.

Addendum: After preparing this story, the writer ran across additional information that indicates that the upper ferry was originally a water powered ferry, then converted to a horse powered conveyance. It was built by a Mr. Herrick of Nekoosa. It was later incorporated into a company which modernized it by converting it to gasoline engine power. An old circular saw blade, probably about three or four feet in diameter was used for summoning the ferry if it happened to be on the opposite bank of the river. A potential traveler of the boat pounded on the saw blade with a piece of metal, the sound alerting the ferry operator. The lower ferry was floated down the river to Germantown Settlement at the mouth of the Yellow River while the upper ferry was dismantled after the first Nekoosa bridge was built in 1916.



ROCHE HOUSE HOTEL,
GRAND RAPIDS, WIS

*Taylor Book,
McMillan Memorial
Library Web Site*

River City Memoirs

Hotel brief home to twins

Five sets born to William and Anne

By Dave Engel
Municipal Historian

"Roche House on fire!"

The weekly Wood County Reporter had just been distributed on a Friday afternoon in January 1883 when the cry was heard up and down the Grand Rapids riverbank of what the next issue would call the "sad news that another beautiful hotel building was passing away in smoke."

At the nearby fire station, the company engineer promptly started his own fire—in the horse-drawn steam engine—and proceeded with it to the scene. But, even

before the engine could even be parked adjacent to Hyde & Co.'s pulp mill, the roof of the upright section of the hotel was in flames.

The efforts to fight the fire didn't go well. When the hoses were ready and the engineer began to work his engine, a hose burst. Work was suspended until another length could be adjusted; the hose burst a second time.

Finally, two streams of water were directed upon the building but it was too little and too late.

Some of the big wheels of the community were part of the volunteer fire department. Frank Wood, Frank Solar, D.W. Compton, Jos. Closuit and many others manned the hose and engine, while J.A. Gaynor, L.F. Cole, W.T. Jones and others went into the burning building to save carpets and beds, risking their lives. Almost everything of value was carried out, even the kitchen stove, dishes and utensils.

Perhaps the firefighters were honoring William Roche, one of the founders of the Grand Rapids Fire Co., in 1873, a year after the hotel was built.

The building was insured for \$3,500 and the household goods for \$1,500 by two companies, the "German American" and "British American," both represented by Mr. C.O. Baker of Rapids.

No lives were lost except that of a dog belonging to Mrs. Roche's youngest son.

The dog's cries were horrible, said the *Reporter*, "as the flames gathered around him and called forth many expressions of sympathy from the multitude present."

The Roche House had been newly painted inside and out only a few months previous which made the loss to Mrs. Roche "all the more severe."

It was supposed the fire originated over the reception room from a defective chimney, there having been a rousing fire in the stove below. The supposition may have been in error.

The day after the blaze, the Roche House ruins were still smoldering when the cry of "Fire!" again broke out and the Green Bay depot was reduced to ashes. These actions were now believed to be the work of an "incendiary" or arsonist.

The homeless Mrs. Roche and family were soon "comfortably located" in the front part of the Rablin boarding house, where they were "assisted by Mr. J. Gokey."

Mrs. Roche's son, Hubert Roche, who "had charge of" the hotel, was absent, having gone to visit his sister, Eva, in Saratoga, where she taught school.

Evaline and Eleanor



William Roche

Research by Nancy Paris, of Coupeville, Wash., great grand daughter of the hotel owners, shows William Roche was born in Cork, Ireland, in 1837.

"Roche" is French for "rock." Early Roche ancestors had come to Ireland from Brittany in France.

Their first home in the United States was Chicago.

Anne Scallon

Anne Scallon was born in a Quebec suburb, in 1834. Her family had come to Canada from Ireland and had moved on to Oasis Township, Waushara County.

William and Anne were married in Winneconne, not far from Oshkosh, Wis., in 1862. It was there that a first set of twins was born and died.

Grand Rapids

Within a short time, the Roches moved to Grand Rapids to join Anne's brother, John Scallon, in his meat market business. Scallon and the Roches invested in a small hotel, the Clinton House.

In 1872, William and Anne built a larger hotel on Water Street near what would be First and Drake streets, on the site later occupied by Wilkinson's Mortuary, in 2001, a private residence.

The hotel, which opened in 1872, catered to the "carriage trade." Furnishings were of good quality and fine china was displayed.

Thanks to the brave volunteers of 1883, an ornate cocoa set, a hand-painted candlestick and a cream-and-sugar set made it through the fire and stayed with the family until the 21st Century.

Western Hotel

Indeed, when the building opened in August 1872, the *Wisconsin Pinery*, commented on the "Western Hotel."

"Mr. Roche is doing for our city, as well as for himself, a splendid work. The house is ... a first class hotel with large spacious airy rooms, capacious basement, and ... an observatory from which the surrounding country may be viewed for miles in either direction—the house is on elevated ground which adds to its stately appearance."

From the cupola one could trace the winding of the river "like a ribbon of

silver," while Grand Rapids and Centralia, "spread out like a glowing panorama, with their beautiful cottages and stately dwellings, and broad acres, rich with verdure presenting a scene most delightfully charming."

The *Pinery* suggested to "Mine Host" Roche, that he "adorn" the vacant land just north of his fine building with choice elm and maple shade trees, walks and arbors, "which will make his house a most agreeable resting place for the traveler, besides adding to its value."

Nettie and Hubert



Family Life

These 11 children were born to William and Anne:

At Winneconne, twins who did not survive.

1864: Twins, Mary Evaline and Eleanor Annie.

1866: Of twins, only Mary Jane survived.

1867: Twins, Hubert William and Anetta Teresa.

1869: Twins, Mary Isabel and Mary

Clarabel.

1871: Francis.

Because the parents were busy with the operation of the hotel, the children were supervised by a series of maids, who told the children frightening stories to keep them in line.

As the children grew, Ella and Eva became surrogate mothers for Isabel and Clarabel, who were five years younger.

The family was said to be cultured and articulate. The hotel library offered classics, novels, poetry and "great works."

OBIT

Six years after the hotel was built and five years before the fire, William Roche, 41, died of tuberculosis and was buried in Calvary Cemetery.

Anne Roche published a letter thanking all who extended their aid and sympathy during the last illness of her beloved husband "and most especially to the Congregational Society of this City, for their kindness in so long forbearing to ring their church bell, the sound of which disturbed his feeble nerves."

When Anne determined to carry on the operation of the business, her son Hubert was able to take over much of the management.

After the Fire

At the advice of a relative, Anne bought a farm near Council Bluffs, Iowa, with insurance money from the hotel

All three older girls, Eva, Ella and Nettie, remained in Wisconsin, as school teachers. Nettie taught at the Woodruff school, between Vesper and Pittsville, and lived with her father's sister, Mary Roche Woodruff.

Hubert, May (Mary Jane), Isabel, Clara and Frank moved with their mother to Iowa, where May and Clara would teach at one-room schools.

Son Hubert was to be the farmer but soon showed he was not suited to the task and the property was sold. A family story reveals that Hubert was given money to deposit in an Omaha bank. When finally located, he had fallen in

with "bad company," who encouraged him to drink too much and then relieved him of his family's funds.

Anne Scallon Roche died in 1906 and is buried in Omaha

Nettie

William and Anne's daughter, Nettie, married Willard E. Carpenter in 1888 in Merrill, where an only child, Natalie, was born.

The Carpenters jointly owned and published the *Waupaca Record* from about 1897 until 1905, when they were divorced.

Nettie carried on independently, much as her mother had; she was owner and publisher of the *Record* until 1912.

In later years, she worked as a social worker at Hartman Trunk Manufacturing in Racine, overseeing working conditions

of the women employees.

In 1934, Nettie moved with her daughter, Natalie, and son-in-law, George Ritchie, back to Wood County, living in Vesper, Wisconsin Rapids and Pittsville.

In the family tradition, Natalie and George Ritchie had a set of twins, John, now of Wisconsin Rapids, and Hubert, who was killed in World War II.

Nettie was the only child of William and Anne Roche to remain in Wisconsin. She died November 11, 1947, and was buried in Calvary Cemetery next to her father—who had died 74 years earlier.

Clarabel and Isabel



PORT EDWARDS AUDITORIUM

The clipping that follows is from the Wisconsin Rapids Tribune of 1925. It tells of events surrounding the dedication of the Port Edwards Auditorium. One remarkable event, not noted in this letter is the moving picture presentation made the night of the dedication. PATHE NEWS CO. presented a newsreel at the start of the program. (Black and white and silent). It was presented on the "giant screen by carbon arc projectors, the electricity being provided by the auditorium's own motor generator." The remarkable part of the movie program was that a PATHE crew was on hand and photographed movies of the local guests arriving at the auditorium for the evening program. Then, the last feature of the evening was the showing of this film of the people arriving earlier that evening. That means that the film (35mm size) was developed and processed and run, all within about a three hour period. Quite a feat for 1925---a feat that is very simple using today's video cassette technology.

"Editor of the Tribune
Dear Sir:

I have just returned from Port Edwards where I took several exposures of the new Community Hall. I, like all others who have had an opportunity to inspect this structure, was surprised and awed by the magnitude and beauty of it all. I found everything up to the minute,

just as you would expect to see things in towns the size of Milwaukee or larger; in fact, some of the scenic effects were the greatest I ever saw.

There are nine shifts of scenery, the regulation asbestos fireproof drop and a rich blue velvet draw curtain. One of the scenes representing the interior of a Dutch Colonial home and the other a village in Switzerland, were the most striking I ever saw. The perspective in the interior was so perfect that I could scarcely imagine that the drawing could be on a flat curtain. The scene typical of Switzerland shows the little village nestling in the foreground, a lake in the middle distance, and the mountains--well you'd swear that they were seventy five miles away. and the fleecy clouds above were real.

(Writer's note: Several windows of homes in the village portion of this scene were actually illuminated by stage lights behind the scene, the light coming through cut out windows.)

On the stage is a switchboard with forty-eight throws and dimmers for the lights, an array of colored and spot lights so that any effect from pale moonlight to the glare of the sun can be produced as well.

The stage is large enough to accommodate practically any show on the road and Mr. Alexander tells me that they can seat over 700 people.

(Writer's note: The stage was reputed to be the largest, best equipped stage in the state, outside of Milwaukee's Davidson Theater.)

The elevated iron cage suspended from the rear ceiling was just ready to receive the finest moving picture equipment and spot light equipment to be had.

I am sure it will be a revelation to the people who attend the opening, which will include seven vaudeville numbers from the Orphum circuit and an eight piece orchestra from Chicago.

To make good things better, I am told by Mr. Alexander that the profits are to be used for the village school fund. A pretty good thing, I'll say."

O.R.Moore



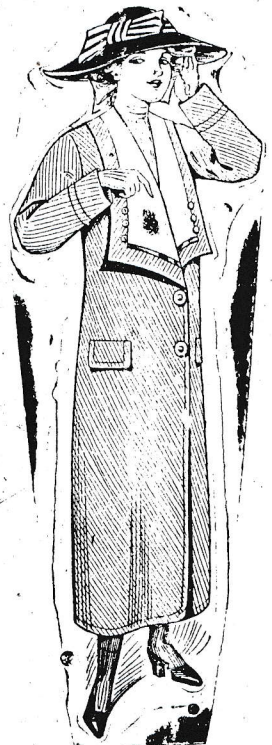
New Spring Coats and Skirts

Snappy and exclusive 1912 styles. The first consignment of ladies and children's coats and skirts have arrived and while assortments are not complete, we are showing some of the handsomest, new and exclusive models in soft, pretty shades of grey, tweeds, diagonal mixtures, reversible two-toned effects also tan, navy, and black serges and silks. A few styles we selected in heavy weights, being very desirable for early spring wear. Scarcely any duplicates.

We offer a splendid ladies' and misses' coat at

\$10.00

and other from \$6.88 to \$25.00



Children's coats size 3 to 6 in Shephard check with blue broadcloth collar.....

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Girl's silk finished rain coat, red and navy size 6 to 14 at.....

\$3.50

Children's coats in pretty mixtures at.....

\$10

The new skirts include the empire waist effect in new gray and tan mixtures and serges at.....

\$4.87

Also white serges and fancies up to

\$8.87

W. C. WEISEL

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

Some more excerpts from John Edwards' Jr's diary of 1878.

May 5: Went up to Berron's mill today with T.B.Scott. River falling fast.

May 6: Went to Mill Creek and then Brawley Rapids. Rained hard. Quinn got his rear over the Brawley dam this afternoon. Con sacked on Connant's just opposite Cawley.

(Quinn, Con and Cawley were Log drivers on the river. Sacked means to stop for the night. Getting the rear over means that the last of the logs had cleared the dam.)

May 11: Mennett laid up today sick. Went up to Mill Creek and back today. (Mill Creek was Edwards' cutting operation in the Sherry area.) Drive will be out of mouth of creek tomorrow forenoon and then will tie up. Water very low.

May 12: Weather very cold and windy. Heavy frost. Water very low. Drive tied up all day.

May 21: At home today. Weather fine and warm. River began to raise this afternoon.

May 22: Went up to Grand Rapids. Sent the log drivers up on log drive today.

May 24: Went up to the drive today at Logman Slough.

May 27: Up to the log drive with Scott today. Drive sacked just at tail of Berron's mill.

May 28: Up on the drive today just down from Slater's. Will get through Pipp's Eddy boom tonight..Water starting to fall.

May 29: Up to the log drive today. Will be to the railroad bridge this evening (Green Bay and Western Bridge).

May 30: Up to Grand Rapids to RR bridge. and water falling fast.

May 31: Up to drive today. Tonight in Buck Skin Slough at the end of Fawndy.(?)

Jun.2: Went to get Doctor Whitney to come and see Mrs. E.

Jun. 4: Went to Mill Creek farm today to locate roads and bridge across Mill Creek. I took the job to do the work. at \$1.50 per day per man. Hans Hald to keep track of it.

Jun.7: At home. Weather cold and cloudy. The drive sacked in through the guard lock this morning. (Port Edwards mill pond entrance.)

Jun. Jun.20: Up to Grand Rapids today settling the Arnold estate with Judge Hayden and Mrs. Bushnap, the guardian. Settled in full. I charged no fees or compensation for my trouble. And am charged no interest for the funds while in my hands., but from this date I am to pay 10 percent for amount in my hands.

Jun 21: Frost at Point Bausse last night. Hurt corn and potatoes. Hired some drivers and sent them up to Jenny. (Merill).

Jun 22. Drivers sent up yesterday returned today. No water. False alarm. Frost again at Pt. Bausse last night.

Jun.24: At Grand Rapids all day for Board of review. John Mercer began school building today.

Jun.26² All crews quit running today and tied up.

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