October 2022 Volume II #66

ARTIFACTS

When Reuben died in a Lodi, Wis., nursing home, among his possessions was a postcard like this, a likeness of the only person ever to visit him.

Where's Reuben?

As the *Age of Artifacts* draws toward its close, the editor reveals a game he's been playing with his printers, Warren Miller of The Print Shop, Erin Schraeder of Neumark and now Traci Biolo of Quality Plus. Somewhere hidden in each issue is a cameo of the Rapids-based hobo, Reuben Lindstrom. There is no peace of mind for cognoscenti until he is found.

By Uncle Dave

Somewhat altered from February 2017 remarks at Mother Fool's coffee shop, Williamson Street, Madison, Wis., for an open mic event hosted by Angelica Engel, former *Artifacts* contributor and current proofreader.

It was all about the hair

Tonight we're thinking that freedom's not just another word for nothing left to lose. Freedom's not another word for grabbing an assault rifle. Like so many Willy Street residents have demonstrated for decades, freedom's another word for growing your hair long and never washing it.

The photo on this page, like its no-shampoo subject, did some hard traveling. Over 30 years ago, the image was part of a "Willy Street Image Gallery" exhibit in the Wil-Mar Neighborhood center near us tonight. Then it disappeared.

Only to show up in a Tennessee antique shop two years ago. The woman who found it launched a *GoFundMe* campaign to buy the photo collection and donate it to the Wisconsin Historical Society, here in Madison, where it now resides.

The caption for the Willy Street display said the figure's name was "Ruben Linstrom," calling him "an 85-year-old hobo."

Reuben told the photographer:

"In them days there wasn't much work but I could get work if I cut my hair. Now I feel like I can't work any more. You know you go to a doctor and he gives you lots of medicine and then you feel worse than ever."

The partial photo on page 3 looks like it was taken about the same time. I have had it for decades, and, on several occasions used it for my own mug shot as "Uncle Dave." It was included in many issues of this publication, if you look hard enough.

Reuben Lindstrom was born in 1896 on a typical farm in a Swedish settlement northwest of Wisconsin Rapids, a few miles from my residence in the town of Rudolph. Reuben could have settled into a life of mind-numbing chores.

But he wanted freedom.

So he saved his wood-cutting money to go off to automobile college in Omaha, Neb. But, like the hepcat he was, he came back, again and again.

When Reuben was 21, his older brother was killed in WWI so Reuben's ma gave him all the money she had saved and told him to start walking north and keep walking until the war was over.

Which he did, all the way to British Columbia, Canada.

Reuben returned about 1929 and took a long canoe trip down the Mississippi.

Until malaria put him in the hospital, where they want to cut your hair; but he concluded that long hair was an antidote for heart attacks and refused.

During the economic depression of the 1930s, Reuben, like so many of his generation, "hoboed" around the country. Had to watch out for the sheriffs, he said, because they too wanted to trim his hair. He had it cut only six times in his life, he said, though he had been jailed 400 times.

If he didn't get locked up every day, something was wrong.

In 1945, as WWII ended and Uncle Dave was born, Reuben, 49, got locked up again, this time in the Wausau jail, having ridden a freight from Rapids. That year, he also steered his motorized bike into a car in Wisconsin Rapids and was injured. At Riverview hospital, the attendant cut his hair.

In 1949, when he was 53, Reuben was pulled off a freight train in Buffalo. N.Y. That incident resulted in the reference on page 6 of this issue.

Like the Biblical Samson, said the reporter, Reuben lost his strength if his hair was cut.

Charged with vagrancy and violation of "the mental health law," our footloose homeboy was sent to another hospital for observation.

In the 1950s, when many of us encountered him, Reuben settled down to $83 a month from Wood County social services to live with a clowder of cats in a shack. Via his custom-made bicycle, he rode the railroad tracks back and forth to Wisconsin Rapids. If there was a wind, he sometimes employed a self-invented sail to push him along.

In fact, he had patented some of his creations, such as wind toys, a wind mill and the bicycle with a one-cylinder gas motor, pulley levers and scooter that allowed him to ride the railroad tracks back and forth to town.

When Reuben moved out of his shack, his former landlord told me he left behind a landfill-sized cache of empty cat food tins.

It was the sixties when I met Reuben on Grand Avenue in downtown Wisconsin Rapids, where he stopped his conveyance between the Army surplus store and the Hiawatha bar to deliver an inscrutable sermon. To my 19-year-old self, he seemed like any verbose charismatic.

In 1968, *Tribune* reporter George Smullen found Reuben living in a dark garage out in the farm country of Sigel and described a Reuben thinner and dirtier than the reporter imagined a person could possibly be. He was especially taken by the hair: long, matted, thick, tangled, dirty, greasy like steel wool.

Reuben asserted that he could easily die if he cut or washed that hair because dirt is natural and prevents diseases from penetrating the skin. He also testified against the combing of hair. He said many people knew that but they still combed their hair because it's a fad.

Nobody would give him a job, Reuben said, not even the carnivals. "Look at the hippies. They've got long hair and they can't get jobs either.

"Fashion is the main religion of this world. If you are different they think you are nuts. Most people stay away from me because they think I'm a religious fanatic."

In his seventies, a decade I have mostly exhausted, Reuben said he hoped to live out his life as he pleased and die in the open.

His nephew, Reuben Garrels, told me that his namesake often stayed outside of Baraboo, Wis. with a sister who once took the elder Reuben to a barber, "the only time I knew of," said the younger Reuben, "that he cut his hair."

In his eighties, Reuben moved on to Madison, where, his nephew said, Reuben had become a hero of the hippies. He tended to hang around Williamson "Willy" Street, already a haven for free spirits and longhairs. Someone told me they remembered seeing him at a drug store soda fountain, his fingerless gloves wrapped around a cup of coffee.

At 86, Reuben, in his downtown apartment, was robbed of his social security payment at knife point by a panhandler known to him as "Dog." He had pushed the man away but Dog grabbed a kitchen knife and threatened to kill him if he didn't give up his money.

Later, after Reuben landed at Methodist hospital's emergency room several times, a social worker placed him at Good Samaritan nursing home in Lodi, Wis., where the staff washed his hair with alcohol.

In 1988 at age 91, Reuben broke his hip trying to get out of bed and was found dead on the floor. No one notified his nephew in Baraboo and Reuben was buried in Mt. Pleasant cemetery, Lodi, with no friends or family present.

The staff at Good Samaritan had followed instructions:

Do not cut his hair.

Ten years later, with Robert Des Jarlais, "the Big Kahuna," I visited the room Reuben had lived in and I saw what he saw out the window: a farm field like those he had known as a boy and later as a so-called hermit, back in Wood County.

His one possession, said the nurse, had been a picture postcard of a woman with a large snake wrapped around her neck. His one visitor in four years was that woman, she said.

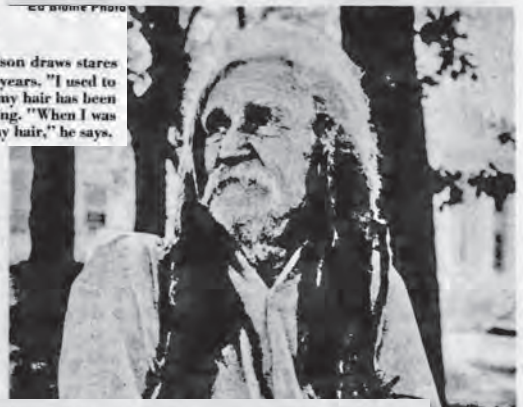
Ruben Lindstrom - 8 Corners - Olsen's Grocery Store - Early 1940's

Posted Internet photo

THE CAPITAL TIMES Bicentennial Section—51

Rock Opera Candidate?

Eighty-year-old Reuben Lindstrom of Madison draws stares wherever he goes. He hasn't seen a barber in 15 years. "I used to have heart trouble," he explains, "but not since my hair has been long." Reuben has spent most of his years traveling. "When I was on the road, police would put me in jail and cut my hair," he says.



Ed Blume Photo

1976
Madison

See June 9, 2001, *Daily Tribune* for Reuben biography, sponsored by SWCHC and republished in *Ghost of Myself*, by Uncle Dave.

July 13, 1968, *Tribune* Staff Writer George Smullen provided a seminal depiction of our most unforgettable character.

Reuben Lindstrom at 72 remains eccentric, inventive and articulate

THE DAILY TRIBUNE, Wisconsin Rapids Saturday, July 13, 1968

By George Smullen
Tribune Staff Writer

Reuben Lindstrom, the long-haired, bearded man on the bike, is Wisconsin Rapids' own myth. Stories will be told and retold for many years about this unique individual.

A self-styled hobo and recluse, Reuben is not only articulate in speech, but is an inventive, eccentric, and interesting individual.

Born 72 years ago on a 40-acre farm on Rt. 1, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lindstrom, he was one of six children, and attended Spring Lake school in the town of Sigel. His only brother was killed in World War I, and he has one sister living in California whom he hasn't seen in 25 years.

His long, matted hair has been a trademark that he's carried with him for about 40 years. What's the reason for it?

"I found out that long hair is an antidote for heart attacks. But long hair isn't enough — you mustn't comb it either. Many people know that, but they still comb their hair because it's a fad.

"Nobody would give me a job after that. Not even the carnivals. Look at the hippies. They've got long hair and they can't get jobs either. It seems that employers don't like to hire people who are different."

Reuben claims that by not combing his hair, the "poison" remains, warding off heart attacks and lice.

As a child he played hooky many times, and some of his fellow hooky-players are still living in the area. What do they say to him?

"They don't talk to me, because I've left them. When you've left them, they won't say a thing.

"The world hasn't changed much in 72 years except for the open country. People are still the same; most of them are good, but they still don't want a fellow like me around them. I suppose some of them wish they were free like me."

It is ironic that a man who has been walking or riding a bicycle the major part of his life, entered the American Automobile College, Omaha, Nebr., in 1916 in order to learn how to drive and fix horseless carriages. He stayed at the school for only two weeks, and then left for North Dakota — the beginning of a long career of "bumming" through the United States. He has never driven a car; he doesn't wish to start.

In that same year, Reuben went to Canada and remained there for 13 years, working as a longshoreman and later as a trapper.

"I liked the trapping at first because I was alone. Just enjoying nature. Trappers don't get along and they can stay together for about a week and then the fighting begins. There were a lot of mean men in those woods, and when they'd get into town, all hell would bust loose."

One horrible incident in which a dog mauled a young child in the Canadian woods still remains in his mind. While checking his traps, he would meet other woodsmen, some transient like himself and yet others who had built log cabins and raised families.

"I knew the trapper lived there with his family. I was walking up to the house and I heard the growling Malamute (Alaskan Husky). They didn't feed their dogs in the summer; not enough food to go around. But they needed those dogs for transportation.

"That dog wasn't content with just biting the child. It ate her. The father didn't care. He just said that he had plenty of other kids. He didn't give much of a damn.

"There was a lot of dying up there. It didn't mean much to anybody. You either lived or died. It didn't matter which. If trappers died in their cabins, we would lay them in their beds, lock the door, and put a sign above the door saying, 'Let him rest'."

Reuben returned to the states in 1929, and became quite ill, he recalls. It was then that he became convinced that long hair was a powerful antidote for heart attacks.

"Hoover was President, and everybody was bumming. The jungles were full of them, and I had to watch out for people stealing things. Had to watch out for the sheriffs too, because they wanted to cut my hair.

"I was pulled into jail many times, but I've had my hair cut only six times. This is my seventh crop. Some cop told me that I had broken a record in the '30s — 400 times in jail. If I didn't get locked up every day, I thought something was wrong."

Reuben quit his roving days approximately 10 years ago. Receiving $83 monthly from the county social services agency, and surplus foods, he now resides in the town of Sigel, renting a dilapidated house with two remaining windows.

He first lived in a garage close by the house, but the "winter was harsh," he said, "and I moved in here." He lives in one room with a pot-bellied stove in one corner.

The room, not surprisingly, is untidy, but in its own way it has the mark of an inventive man. In one corner of the room, one sees the parts of his railroad bike, another of his trademarks.

In order to stay away from heavy traffic, and the eyes of staring people, he still prefers to "ride the rails," but he now rides them differently — on his bike.

Reuben often visits the downtown area, buying food as cheaply as possible. He enjoys the sun and breeze, and an occasional chat with particular people — those who accept him as he is — because he has had some disappointing incidents with "others."

Teen-agers, he said, give him the most trouble. They sometimes "throw things" at him, and they often call him names. He enjoys the almost daily jaunts to town, however, and he said that he'll continue his trips "as long as I am able."

He works frequently on his bicycle, which he has made into an utilitarian instrument. Every modification, he said, is a practical change, and all encumbrances are removed. The rail-bike is purely "reuben-esque" in design.

His ingenious invention is actually quite simple. Both bicycle wheels ride on top of one rail. Attached to the axle of the front wheel is a shaft, which leads to a flanged wheel that fits the rail perfectly.

Attached to the rear of the bike is a telescoping rod with another wheel attached. This wheel is placed on the opposite rail to give the bike reasonable balance.

When it is necessary for him to leave the track, he folds the attachments, inserts them in their proper places on the bike frame, and he is ready to ride on street or highway.

Reuben thinks that if railroad companies were to adapt this invention to a small motorcycle, the operators would have more mobility and ease in transportation.

"Even a railroad cop could check the line, then. Warn the kids, though. Tell them that they shouldn't try this because it isn't safe. They could get killed if they fell and struck their head against a track or a rock."

This rail-bike is only one of Reuben's inventions. Among others, he has a patent, issued in 1940, on a windmill with a wheel designed for attachment of a belt, which Reuben said could be used as a source of cheap power where there is no water.

In conclusion, Reuben said that he'll remain a hobo at heart, and he hopes that society will permit him to live out his life as he pleases. He realizes that he can die from causes other than heart attacks, but he wishes to die in the open, not in a hospital or convalescent home.

According to spokesmen from the county Social Services office and the city police, Reuben is eccentric but he is neither a troublemaker nor is he dangerous.

Riding the rails — With the self-invented and constructed apparatus attached to his bicycle, 72-year-old recluse Reuben Lindstrom is able to ride from his rural home to Wisconsin Rapids on the North Western railroad tracks avoiding traffic congestion with apparent ease. (Tribune Photo)

Reminiscing — Tribune photographer Jim Frost captured a touch of pastoral serenity in the above portrait of Reuben Lindstrom, sitting by his treasured bicycle. Man and bike can often be seen on Wisconsin Rapids streets.

Old chum grateful grandchildren omitted

BARBOURVILLE, Ky. (AP)) — William Woodson attended a class reunion where two chums met for the first time in 30 years.

One dominated the conversation by recounting the exploits of his children.

The other started to leave and was halted by this remark: "Wait," urged the long-winded speaker, "I haven't told you about my grandchildren."

"No," came the reply, "and I appreciate it."

SAMSON WITHOUT DELILAH— Reuben Lindstrom, 55, says whenever he cuts his hair he gets heart trouble. So for the past 25 years he hasn't had a haircut and is feeling fine. Lindstrom, who travels all over the country doing odd jobs, was taken off a freight train by railway police in Buffalo, N. Y.

I love to see the towns a-passin' by
And to ride these rails
'neath God's blue sky
Let me travel this land,
from the mountains to the sea
'Cause that's the life I believe
he meant for me

And when I'm gone
And at my grave you stand
Just say God's called home
your ramblin' man

Hank Williams
"Ramblin Man"

R.I.P. Reuben

Museum Happenings

By Alison Bruener
SWCHC Staff

As the days grow shorter, a crisp note is in the air and work is underway to prepare for the sixth annual Christmas Tree Walk. While the Museum has been closed this year for remodeling on the first floor, we are ready to open our doors to the community so you can include us in your holiday plans.

Dates for the 2022 Christmas Tree Walk

Saturday and Sunday, December 3-4 (12-4 p.m.)

Monday, December 5 (12-4 p.m.)

Friday, December 9 (5-8 p.m.)

Saturday and Sunday, December 10-11 (12-4 p.m.)

This event is free and welcomes all ages.

Looking ahead, the Museum has extended its exhibit season. Starting the new year, we will be hosting several traveling displays, described on the following page.

We will also maintain our customary exhibit hours of Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday 1-4 p.m.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (February 5-26)

Provided by *Conceive Believe Achieve,* our first traveling exhibit depicts the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Through King's struggles and accomplishments for civil rights, the non-profit aims "to provide information and exposure about other cultures to help everyone thrive in a culturally diverse society."

Great Lakes, Small Streams: How Water Shapes Wisconsin (March 5-26)

The Wisconsin Historical Society asks, "How has water shaped Wisconsin, and how have we shaped our water?"

Sixteen panels tell the story in simple language through 70 photographs and documents, creating an exhibit aimed at all ages.

Neighbors Past and Present: The Wisconsin German Experience (April 9-May 27)

The final traveling exhibit, "Neighbors Past and Present," contains 14 panels that illustrate German migration and settlement in Wisconsin. It covers ethnicity and identity in newly-forged communities and the cohesiveness of these communities over the decades, especially in times of economic crisis or war.

Uncle Dave's Flood Dream

Lori's following account of a ghost highway brought to mind my recurrent dream of the same "Lovers' Lane" but without the trees. Most importantly, the entire roadway is under a foot or more of floodwater through which I need to drive a car following invisible and shifting pavement. The river is to my left and dry land somewhere to the right. That would mean, if I don't drown, I will land, where dreamers do, in Nekoosa.

UD

Century Ago

River Road Paved Way Between Mills

By Lori Brost
Museum Administrator

So many times over my 14 years at the South Wood County Historical Museum, Port Edwards historian Marshall Buehler has given me a glimpse into images he collected, categorized and labeled at the Alexander House, many of which exist nowhere else. I have always wanted to find a way to ensure those images weren't lost and could be shared with Artifacts readers.

On behalf of the Museum, I spent a few months last year scanning images at the Alexander House. And I have to say, there are way more gems in this group than I could have imagined. A few, including those shown here, sparked enough interest for me to dig into the back story.

There has always been a connection between the paper mill towns of Nekoosa and Port Edwards, whether it be Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co., local families, usually headed by mill workers, or the shared banks and businesses that served owners and workers alike.

A century ago, 1922, brought a tangible connection worth celebrating then and now.

In 1912, the first blocks of concrete highway had been laid in Port Edwards. Throughout the years, more was added, a little at a time. On Tuesday, March 7, 1922, the County Highway Committee and Commissioner Edward Morris were assured that there was plenty of cement available for the 1.5 mile stretch of highway that would connect the two towns.

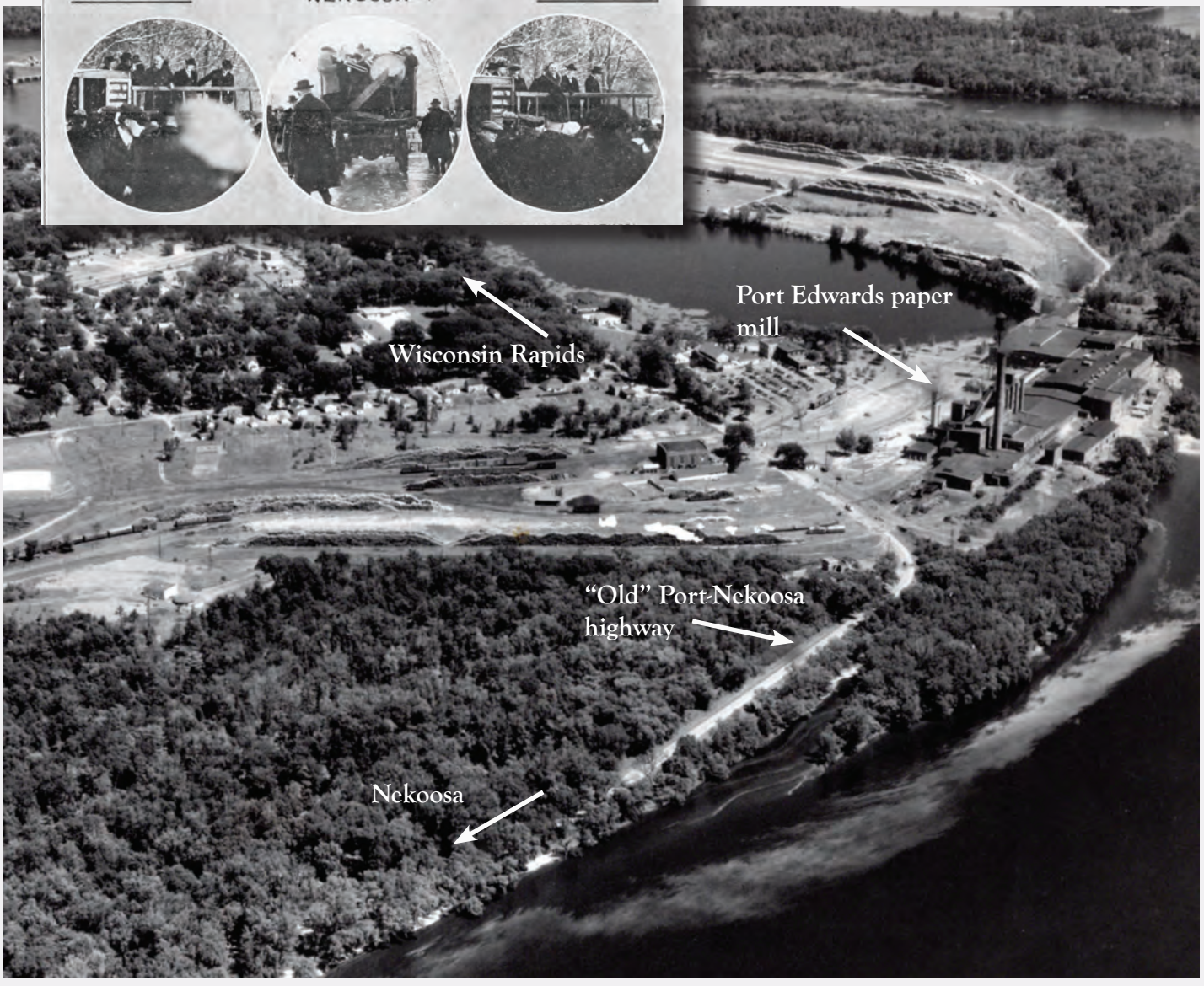
Within weeks, the county received six bids between $32,233 and $43,000. Awarded the project was McCarthy and Krause, a local contracting firm. The $2.02 per square yard would include excavation, grading and culvert work besides the 1.55 miles of concrete that would reroute Highway 13 north from Nekoosa along the scenic river bank into Port Edwards just west of the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. mill and into "downtown" Port.

Despite promises from the highway commission, progress was hindered by the threat of a railroad strike, the shutdown of Lehigh Cement Co. due to fuel shortage, high waters from the Wisconsin River, a rock shortage and the general inability of McCarthy & Krause to finish the project in a timely fashion.

Cont. on p. 12

Left: December 1922 Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. Safety Bulletin commemorating new highway.

Below: Then-new concrete road attaching the villages and mills of Port Edwards (upstream) and Nekoosa. Domtar Corp. closed its mill in Port Edwards in 2008, eliminating about 500 jobs. The Port mill is likely to be removed in 2023 just over 100 years after the river road was built.



Cont. from p. 10

August brought rumors of an error in determining the grade for the highway which resulted in a considerable delay, though those rumors were deemed false by the state highway office and progress continued. It was then announced that, to ensure the work done prior to the cement being laid was not money wasted, the highway would be completed within the year, before high waters could do any damage.

The fall of 1922 was quite eventful for the South Wood County area. In October, a committee needed to name the new Wisconsin Rapids bridge that had been enabled by our own State Senator, Isaac Witter, and chose "Grand Avenue Bridge,"also renaming Vine Street as Grand Avenue.

A Nov. 27, 1922, event on the new Port-Nekoosa route featured mayors J.J. Mlsna of Nekoosa and C.A. Jasperson of Port Edwards shaking hands over a temporary fence shutting off the highway. Mayor Mlsna thanked Len Smith of the celebration committee for the turnout of almost 600, adding that it was the "duty of the people of Nekoosa, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids to cooperate in boosting the use of State Trunk Highway 13 to all friends and tourists."

County Highway Commissioner Edward Morris praised the alterations made to better the road and make it safe against high water. He thanked the villages for their cooperation during the process.

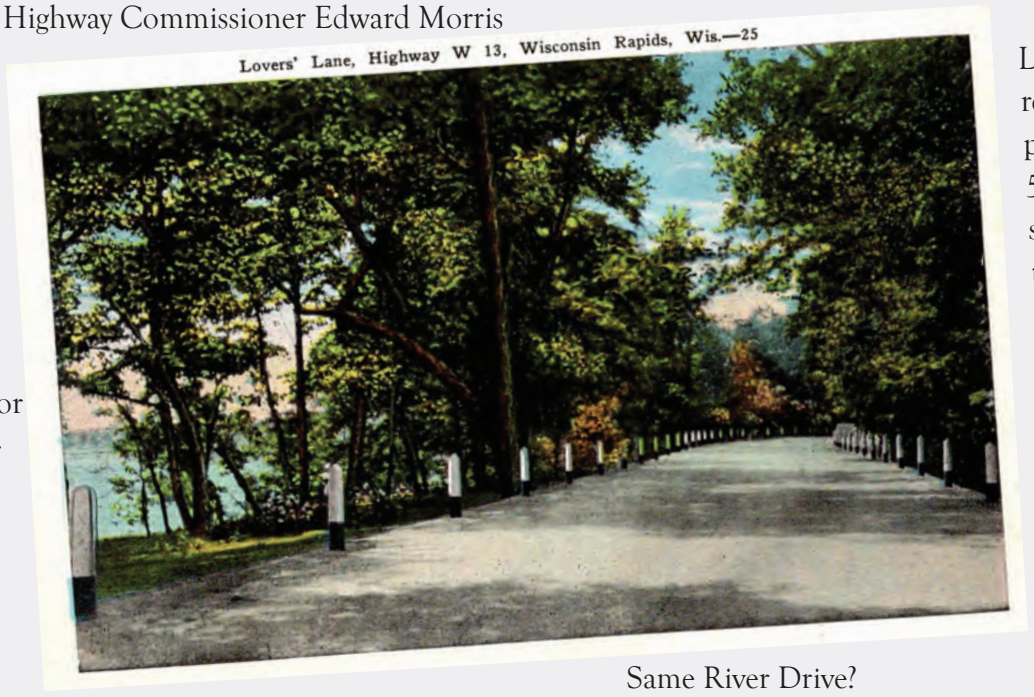
Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. president L.M. Alexander told of the first trail blazed down the same route 25 years prior. He said this new roadway was both beautiful and picturesque, as he shared a plan for the wooded areas he owned along both sides of the road to create a preserve for birds and smaller animals.

President of the Village of Port Edwards C.A. Jasperson praised the village of Port Edwards for appropriating nearly $40,000 and for the sale of bonds that made the road a possibility. He concluded his speech by pronouncing the road open to the public as the crowd adjourned for coffee, sandwiches and music provided by the Service Battery Band.

Soon, the scenic road, like so many across the country, would be nicknamed "Lovers' Lane."

At some point in late 1937, Highways 13 and 73 were interchanged. At "Smokey Joe's" corner, if the traveler coming north headed west to Nekoosa, they would now be traveling down Highway 73. The highway to Rapids continued to be named 13.

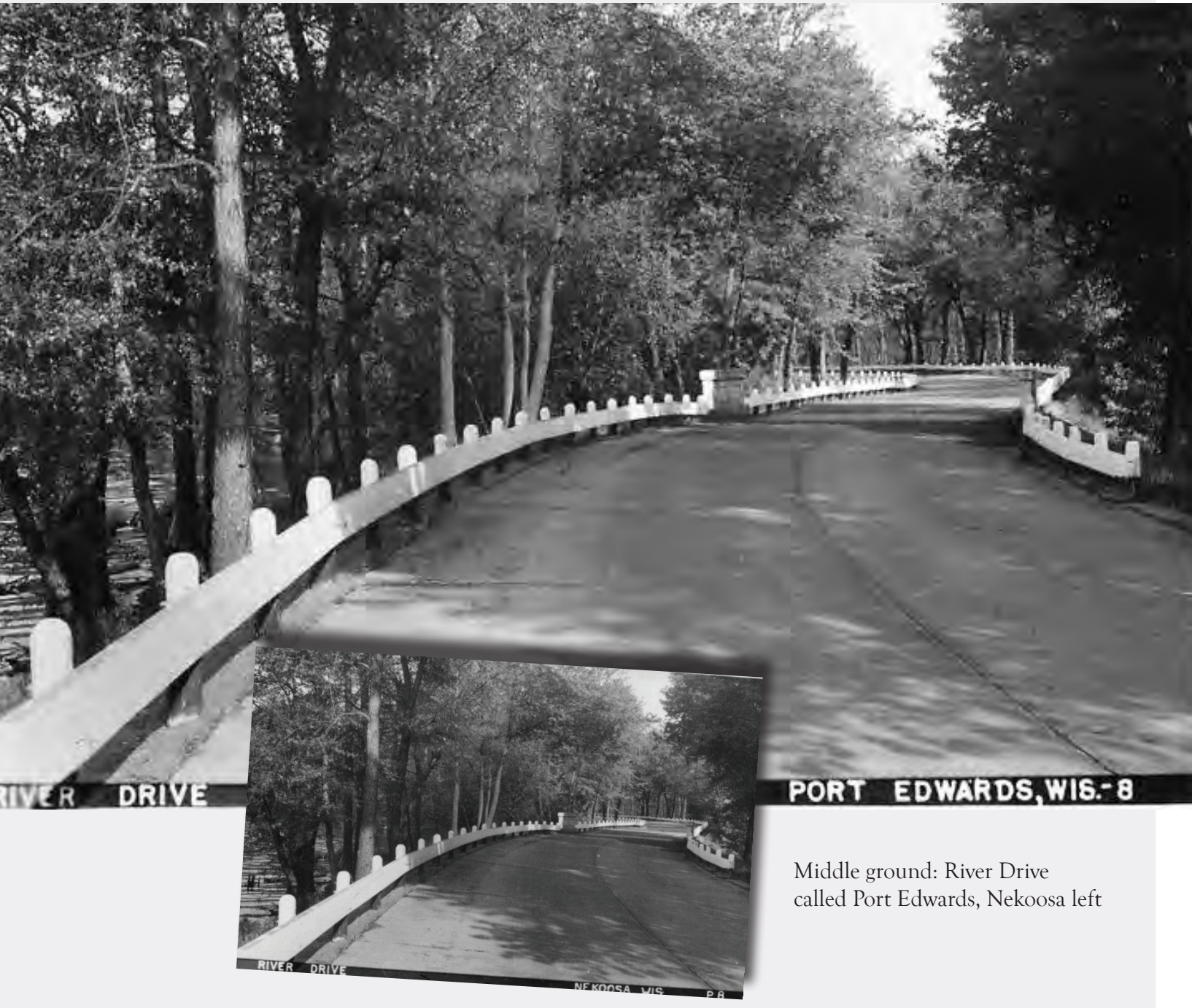
Due to expansions within the Nekoosa-Edwards (NEPCO) Port Edwards mill around 1972, the Lovers' Lane section was rerouted to the parallel Highway 54. While still scenic and home to the variety of wildlife Mr. Alexander had espoused, it is no longer open to the public to drive through.



Same River Drive?

Part of a national movement toward paved thoroughfares, the modern "cement" highway shown has been attributed photographically to Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Nekoosa.

Most photos here courtesy of Alexander House, a Port Edwards archives and art venue.

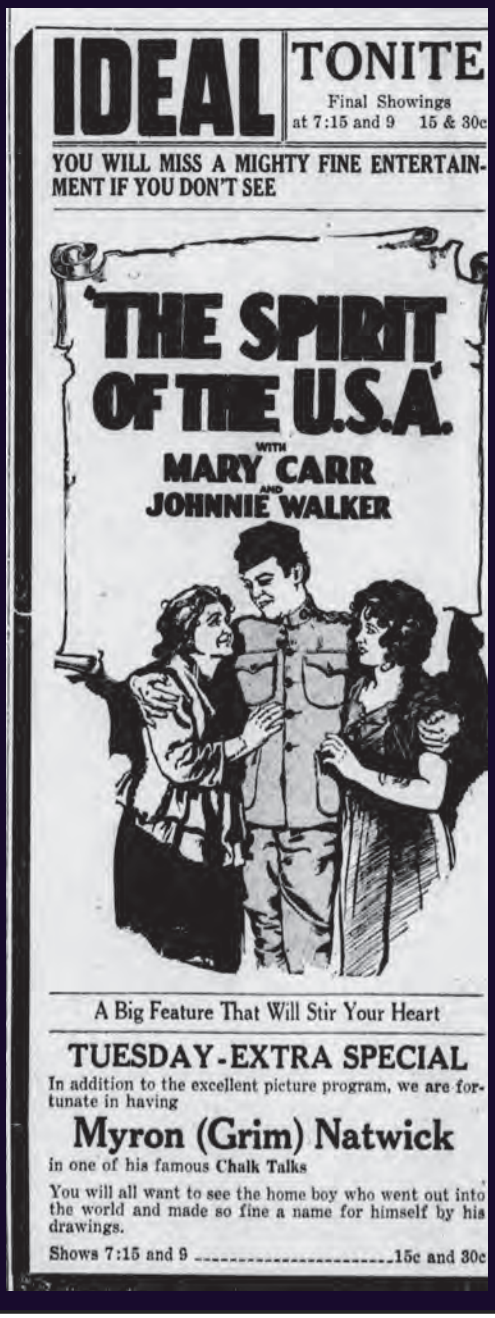


Middle ground: River Drive called Port Edwards, Nekoosa left

NATWICK NOTES

See previous *Artifacts* for interviews with SWCHC supporters John and Mae Jacobson Natwick, appreciations of Uncle Dave's bocce pal, Jim Natwick, and references to Grim Natwick.

Later Rapids Theatre, now Rogers Cinema



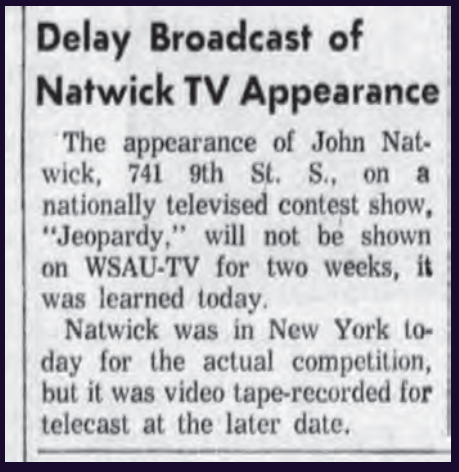
Elsewhere in this issue...

George Mead II:
"Then of course, the house next door, which is still there, was the Natwick family, between my dad's house and Sweet's grocery. The Natwicks became very prominent in the paper business generally. One of them was Grim, the artist. They all were older than I was. I walked past the house every day, but I didn't know them."

Answer: Julann Wright, Ironwood, Mich.
Question: Who created the TV quiz show, Jeopardy?
Wright was already married to TV mogul Merv Griffin, when, in 1963, flying back to New York after visiting her parents in Ironwood, she asked, "What happened to knowledge-based games?" adding, "Why don't you give them the answers and make people come up with the questions?"

March 20, 1967

TITLE HOLDER — Having won the title of "Mrs. Wisconsin Rapids" in final competition here Saturday, Mrs. John Natwick is now eligible to compete for the "Mrs. Wisconsin" crown and the right to enter the national finals to be held in California. (Tribune Photo)



Delay Broadcast of Natwick TV Appearance

The appearance of John Natwick, 741 9th St. S., on a nationally televised contest show, "Jeopardy," will not be shown on WSAU-TV for two weeks, it was learned today.

Natwick was in New York today for the actual competition, but it was video tape-recorded for telecast at the later date.

George W. Mead II worked for and with John Natwick, whose overly orange easy chair continues to discomfit Port quaffers in Uncle Dave's office.

Centerfold: Johnson Hill's

Close look at enlargement shows centerfold p. 16-17 could be dated by albums for sale, mostly on the uncool side of the rack: Satchmo, Al Hirt, Glenn Miller, Henry Mancini. (Hepkids spun their 45s across the river at Your Record Shop.) 1965 photo.

Mae Natwick's travel shop was on mezzanine of Johnson Hill's


Sunex
RCS
RCS
RCS
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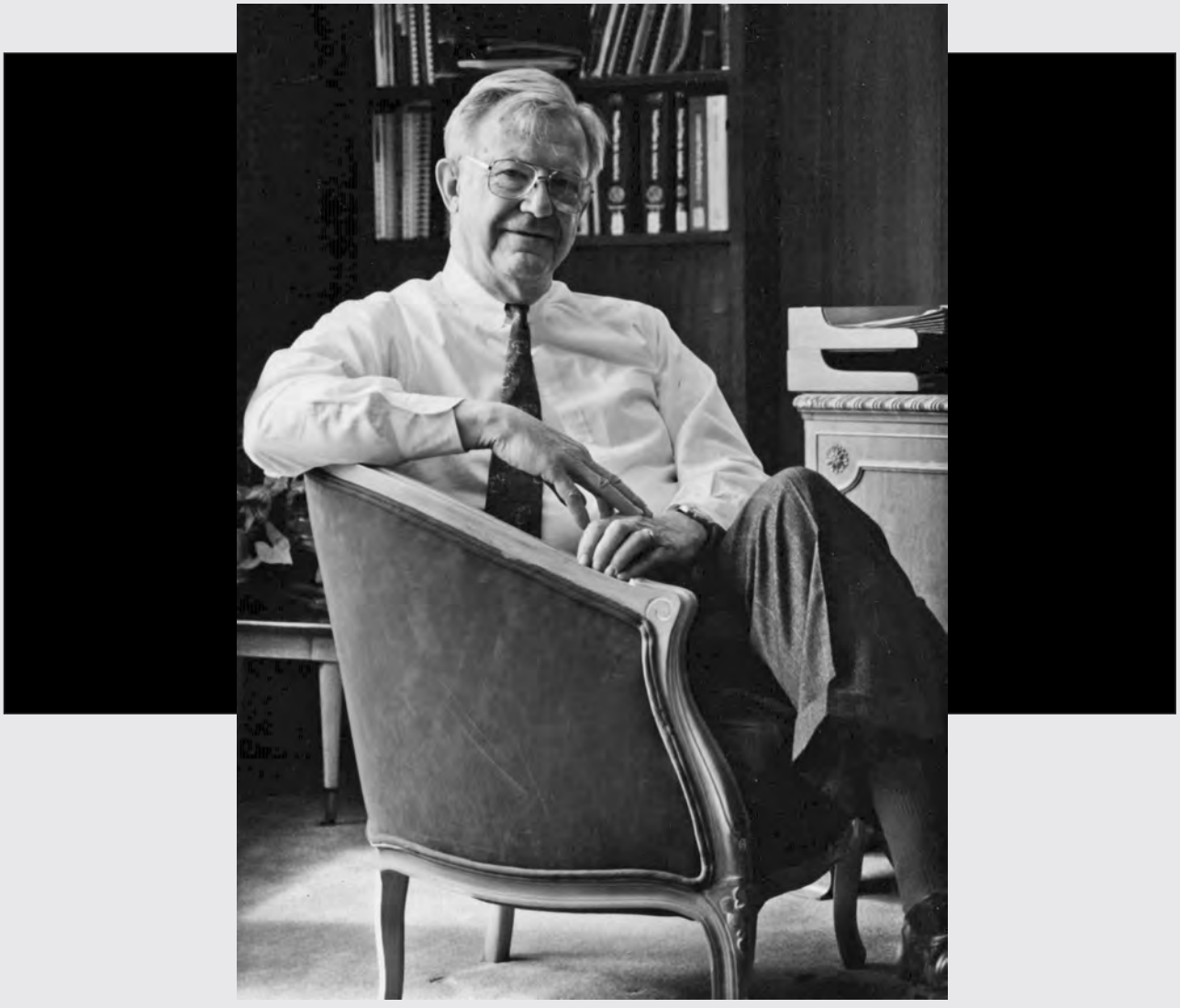
Just George

Consolidated heir was proud to be one of us



George Mead II
(Oct. 11, 1927-July 29, 2022)
Interview with Dave Engel
Photo by Dave
CPI Old Office Building
2 April 1997

Lineage of George Mead II

George Mead II was heir to a succession of industrialists. On the Witter side was his great-great-grandfather, Isaac Phelps, banker of Grand Rapids, Mich. Isaac's daughter, Emily, married George's great-grandfather, Jere D. Witter, biggest investor of Grand Rapids, Wis. J.D.'s daughter, Ruth, married George Mead I.

On the Mead side was great-great grandfather James Spare, a lumber merchant of Galena, Ill., father of Abigail Spare who married Darius R. Mead, a Chicago lumberman. Abigail and Darius were parents of George Mead I, president and main owner of Consolidated Papers, Inc. as was George I and Ruth's son, Stanton W. Mead, father of George II, featured here.

As told to Uncle Dave

"George Wilson Mead." My granddad got that name when he was born. I was just named after him, that's all.

My dad was Stanton Witter (You know where that comes from) Mead. My dad was born in double 0, in the late fall.

My mother, Dorothy Williams, was three or four years younger.

I was born in Milwaukee, Oct. 11, 1927. My mother's parents, Burt and Maud Williams, were living there. He had been up in Ashland as mayor around the turn of the century.

My mother had a lot of friends in Milwaukee. Her closest friend was a Uihlein, the Schlitz brewing family. She knew some of the Pabsts.

My grandfather, Burt Williams, was somehow associated with the Internal Revenue Service. He had an appointment, I think, from Woodrow Wilson. When he moved to Madison, Burt went back to what was probably his first love, public relations. That's how he, his daughter having married George Mead's son, became affiliated with Consolidated and he finally moved here to Wisconsin Rapids. I lived here all my life, really. I lived at 730 First Ave. S., the big brick building, now Northland Cranberry.

George Wilson Mead I

It would be early 1926 when my folks got married. My granddad, George Mead, bought that house when Stanton married my mother. The Nashes had built it. The story of that house and how it burned and was built again: I think you know it better than I do.

The house was not well-heated when I was real young. Why not, I don't know, because it had two big, coal-burning furnaces: hot water heat with radiators.

About the only memory I have is going down next to the wood-fired cook stove in the kitchen to get dressed in the morning. It was cold. That would be in the middle of winter.

We had a cook, we had a maid, and for my brother and sister, we had a lady. By the time I got to kindergarten, she was gone. She was Scandinavian, I used to hear from her once in a while. She married a Norwegian ship captain and moved to Brooklyn.

I believe I went to kindergarten in what is now East Junior High, though I don't remember it; then I walked down the street to Lowell School, four or five blocks away. Came home for lunch.

Walked right by Sweet's Grocery. When you had a nickel or even a penny, you went in there and got a little candy for a penny or an ice cream cone, probably for a nickel. Bill Sweet tended store. Wife tended store. You bet.

That would have been grade school days. During my upper grades, Ruth Horton was both the principal and math teacher, I believe. I got interested in math through her and carried it through all my life. The one teacher I remember best at Lowell School was Al Normington's mother. She was a music teacher. She went around, school to school. That would have been in third or fourth grade. This was the Normington laundry and dry cleaning company too. I knew Jay. They had strong connections up in Stevens Point and in the Tomorrow River area.

I took piano lessons. Joe Liska gave me violin lessons. Nothing ever really caught. I tried in high school. Trumpet. Fooled around with a bass.

Ended up singing with the Yale glee club, toured Europe and all that kind of thing so I was a reasonably qualified singer.

I got to love music and I still do. I still own a stand-up bass. I haven't played it in years. In our house, we have a very elaborate stereo system which is wired throughout the house so I can listen to it wherever I feel like it.

Gwen Cobleigh was the athletic person at Lowell. There were other teachers that floated around as well, from school to school.

Readin' writin' 'rithmetic. Some history, things like that. And a good atmosphere.

There was a gym and there was some basketball. Not much organized. We certainly didn't make a point in that age group of going around to other schools and having competition or anything. It was just a case of getting that youthful energy burned off.

You didn't like everybody and sometimes you had your friction. Sure, I got in fights. He still lives in town. I'm not going to name his name. The usual, sure, go off in a corner and scuffle for a while and get a bloody nose and quit.

Consolidated News

Mr. Stanton Mead, Production Manager of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Company.

Lots of kids in the neighborhood more or less my age. Cliff Peterson lived down on First Avenue about where the Expressway comes through now. The Eron family, the plumbing family, was nearby. There was the Gee family. That's the Eron and Gee plumbing family. Donald and Dorothy. Blanche Bush was a classmate. She and I had a couple, sort of "go to the movies" dates.

My dad owned the property clear back to the railroad tracks where the St. Mary's church and school sits now, so we had a huge back area to play in.

The concrete pad between the house and the barn was an area for a game called "kick the can." You put a can in the middle and then you went and hid. If you could get to the can before the guy looking for you found you and you could kick it, you could go out and hide again. Otherwise, you had to be the finder.

The barn's gone now. It's a shame they took it down.

There was a very small stream through the back yard. It was a natural flow when I was real young. The city put in a storm sewer and drained it, so my dad put in a little dam and a pump and kept the water running artificially for many years. There was a willow tree over the stream. We'd climb on that willow tree and jump in the stream. The water was never more than a few inches deep.

One of my best pals in the neighborhood was Carl Knudsen. Carl's dad had the Standard Oil station at the corner of First and Third avenues, at the triangle where they come together down there. He was three years older than I was. His mother would dress him up real nice and send him over. We'd play together in the basement of the house and he'd get all dirty. He'd go home, and his mother would change him and send him back again. The father became mayor. Great guy, immigrant. Danish accent, or Scandinavian.

The main family bedrooms were on the second floor. The first room was a guest room. The second room around the periphery was a sitting room with a desk. The third room was my parents' bedroom. My sister, Mary, who was born August 29, 1934, had the fourth room. My brother and I shared a room at the back. They're all [Northland Cranberry] offices today.

My brother is Gilbert Dunbar Mead, born May 31, 1930.

Gilbert and I both went to Lowell school. My brother was an excellent pianist and is to this day. He also had a mathematical bent.

I don't think I was a particular leader or anything in those days. I was just one of the guys in the neighborhood; at least I tried to be.

We always had a dog. We had Samoyeds, Cockers, different kinds.

During World War II, we kept a couple pigs. We meant to eat them but I don't think we had the heart. There may have been a horse for a little while once, but I can't remember that clearly.

The yard man was named Louie Bord. His headquarters was in the barn. Kept the lawn mowed and the snow shoveled and the garden tended. Big flower garden, big vegetable garden.

Consolidated News

President Stanton W. Mead

Twelve below zero puts frosty touch on Main Office glass.

I was seven or eight when I had my own little garden. I raised vegetables and hawked them in the neighborhood. Lettuce, radishes, green onions. I had to have low skill vegetables.

When I was probably in seventh grade, Morgan Midthun recruited me to sell and deliver *Saturday Evening Post* and *Country Gentlemen*. I took my bike and would go around and deliver magazines. It was fun because you got to know people.

Old Captain Nash up on Oak Street. I don't remember Philleo in those days. I remember Nash's daughter, Jean. I was probably twelve, eleven at that time.

Then of course, the house next door, which is still there, was the Natwick family, between my dad's house and Sweet's grocery. The Natwicks became very prominent in the paper business generally. One of them was Grim, the artist. They all were older than I was. I walked past the house every day but I didn't know them.

Palace Theater wasn't that far away, the DeByl's building today. I went to Saturday afternoon movies all the time. Cowboy movies, serials. My memory of those serials were over in the old Rapids, down where the theater still is.

I remember getting what probably was the flu, just when they were having the last episode of some serial and after twenty weeks of watching Dick Tracy, whoever it was, I couldn't go when they were wrapping it up. Boy, was I mad.

I had a small allowance I suppose, very limited. I didn't need much. Nobody did, in those days.

I roamed a lot. As I got older, I roamed more.

By the time I got into grade school, the Williams had moved to town and they took an apartment on the second floor of what I guess is now called the Elms on the corner of Mead and Third. I thought nothing of walking or taking my bike across Grand Avenue Bridge to see my grandparents. They would take me to Wilpolts for supper or a cone. Or over at Herschleb's place next to the Rapids Theater for ice cream. Or even into Quick Lunch once in a while.

G.W. II: The Consolidated News in those days was very personal. It even took ads. My picture appeared several times. People keep sending them to me when they're cleaning out their attic. I don't remember. No memory of any of that.

George Mead, son of Stanton Mead, and Sally Mead, daughter of Walter Mead, pose for the photographer just after taking part in the doll parade.

Consolidated News

A COMING PAPER MAKER

George Wilson Mead II, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Stanton Mead, who was two years and one month old on Armistice Day, is seen enjoying the recent flower show.

Although George is only two years old he already shows a great deal of interest in paper making, judging from the method he uses in tearing a newspaper apart to test its tensile strength .

My other grandmother, Ruth Witter, had an electric car. It was new at the time. It went nice and slow. It steered with a stick.

I must have walked to the house; then she would give me a ride back downtown. The garage underneath the big brick house that I live in today had a big plug on the back wall and you drove in there and you plugged it in and got it charged.

In the fall of 1940, when I was twelve or thirteen, Wendell Willkie came to Wisconsin Rapids on his unsuccessful campaign to unseat Franklin Roosevelt as President. My grandfather had him stay at his house and had a late reception in his honor.

After Mr. Willkie went upstairs, my grandfather asked me how it felt to meet a presidential candidate.

I replied that I had stayed back and never shook his hand.

My grandfather said that must be corrected.

We went upstairs and my grandfather knocked on the door. Mr. Willkie said 'Come in' and we did. Mr. Willkie had both shoes and one sock off.

My grandfather apologized, but said he did not want his grandson to miss the opportunity to shake his hand. So he graciously did so.

Once my mother's folks moved to town, in about 1932 or 1933, Burt Williams went to work more full-time for Consolidated.

I think my mother's parents had more time to fuss over me. My grandfather would take me up to, is it Pelican Lake? Fishing.

When I was in eighth grade, Carl Knudsen was about a junior in high school and so we hung around a lot downtown. Go in Wilpolts and kid the waitresses and have a Coke. We hung around the pool hall a little bit. Woolworth's was up there, where the furniture store is now. I was in it a lot. It was dime store. I knew the manager, Louis Shugart, quite well.

Johnson Hill's.

I didn't know Johnsons so well, but I got to know Mr. Hill because they lived kitty-corner from both grandparents, in the white house. George Hill, a wonderful, stately man, tall and straight and very distinguished looking gentleman. He was one of the original investors in Consolidated. Both those families did very well with that. Ken Hill, I see him almost every day today.

There was a Witter lady that still lived in what is now the historical society, Charlotte Witter, I believe. I, for some reason, didn't know her. She would have been my great-aunt. I don't know why but I never knew Isaac and I never knew Charlotte. I spoke to Jere Witter once on the telephone.

I said, "As long as I've got you on the phone, I have to ask you if you flew under the railroad bridge."

He said, "No."

The Witters from Wausau were Jean and Dean. Dean Witter and Company is still a brokerage firm of some consequence. He was second cousin, I think. I think Dean Witter went to Stanford, at least some California college, and stayed.

I just didn't know about the Witters that much. I guess there was disharmony and I guess the Witters left and all that, but that's all part of the record and I wasn't part of it. The first I remember of that building is when it was the library. I must have gone to it.

Much like George Hill, my grandfather, George Mead, was a very distinguished gentleman. I was a little bit in awe of him frankly, compared to my other grandfather, who was a little easier to get to know.

When the company was rebuilding the wooden section of the Consolidated water power dam right out here behind us, I finally pestered my granddad, George, into giving me a pass, which I typed at home and he signed, so I could hang around the construction. I was ten or twelve.

I'm not sure when, but my grandfather on my mother's side, Burt Williams, had an office in the basement of this building. I remember visiting him and I know I visited my other grandfather here as well.

My grandfather's house was a little different then. I've owned it twice. We visited there a great deal as a family. We normally had Sunday dinner. The Walter Meads would be there. Once the Baldwins moved to town in the mid-thirties some place, they'd be there. They lived up just beyond the Mead up on Oak. The house is gone now.

Walter Mead lived in the house now thought of as the Baldwin house, the white house on The Island. My cousin, Sally, was a year older than I and a pretty good friend of mine. We played in that wooded area on the north end of the island where we had a little clubhouse.

Sometime in the late thirties, Walter and his family moved to Chicago and then Baldwins moved into that house and remodeled it extensively.

The family sat around and talked and discussed the sermon and things like that. George Mead sat at the head of the table. At the other end, his wife, my grandma. He was in charge.

By today's standards, quite formal, but it didn't seem formal at the time.

GEORGE WILSON MEAD, II

George is the three-year old son of Stanton W. Mead, general manager of Consolidated, and from the serious consideration he is giving the photographer one can readily see that he is weighing some big problems.

George's only remark during the taking of the picture was letsmakethissnappyandgetitoverwith.

Pretty boring stuff for a ten-year-old kid. I always had to go over to my grandmother and ask permission to leave the table. She had fairly poor hearing and used a mechanical hearing device, which was just a big curved horn. I'd go up to her and talk into the horn and say, "May I be excused please, Nana."

She'd say, "Yes, of course," and we'd all go out and chase around the yard.

On Sunday, there was church at the First Congregational Church, that wonderful old stone building. I think most of us went pretty regularly. My granddad would sit near the front and there were some wires to a little hearing earphone thing he would use so he could hear better. The family sat in the second row down front, even the first row. We had Sunday school. Later on, I sang in the choir.

And then, after Sunday dinner, probably a drive in the country. Some car we had had little to no heat, so a winter drive involved huge bearskin-type robes. They'd take these little things that had a drawer in them and put hot burning charcoal in otherwise you were going to lose your toes.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, I went up to see the Dubay dam being built. They came home and holy cow! We'd heard it on the car radio already. Pearl Harbor. I was a freshman at Lincoln in those days.

I was very close to the Williamses. I think I was two, two and a half when my eyes were acting up. I went down to Madison to a famous eye doctor down there, named Dr. Davis, used to drive down there to see him and to see my grandparents.

My dad told me this story and I guess it's true.

I had been down visiting my grandparents in Madison for several days and my folks came down to get me.

I cried so much when I left they took me back and left me for another few days.

Burt Williams was jovial, tall, a little heavy set. Very friendly. Not the more dignified posture of my other grandfather. More the salesman. He had been a newspaper editor up in Ashland [Wis.] and mayor. He was an active Democrat. My other grandfather was a very active Republican and they were great friends. It didn't matter in the house.

My father met my mother when he was working in Ashland. She was visiting, I think. Her family had moved to Milwaukee long before that.

Stanton had a summer job up there. Consolidated hauled that wood across Lake Superior. He was working right there at the landing.

Grandmother Maud Williams had bad asthma. One of the vague memories was the ozone generator she kept around to help her breath. Very good-hearted. Not very involved in anything. She apparently had bad emphysema, that's probably what you'd call it today.

That's one of the things that's always frightened me, all of my life. I get my annual physical and make sure my lungs are working good.

My other grandmother, Ruth [Witter] Mead, died in about 1937 of cancer. I was about ten. I remember her being in a coffin and my grandfather taking me over there and saying, "Give her a kiss on the forehead," and that kind of thing. I don't remember the funeral so much as having her in the house where I am now.

My dad was on a boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, coming back from a vacation, when Grandfather George died. So I became the family funeral director for a while. Grandfather died around 1960. I'm quite sure I had him in the house first and then down at the Congregational Church.

There was him and then my cousin, Henry Baldwin.

Walter was in the same house on The Island we were talking about, next to the George Mead house, until the late thirties when he established a sales office in Chicago for the company.

He owned all of what is now Riverwood Lane and River Ridge and all of that. There was a farmhouse and way down on the end, they built a swimming pool. That was one of the great summertime events: to go over there and go swimming with Henry and Walter and Walter giving me rides on his shoulders into the pool and things like that.

Henry Baldwin joined the company. I recall him being pretty much the senior production person when I came here in 1952. I don't know what his earlier assignments were.

There are many pleasant memories of Florida. My mother's parents, the Williams, would take an apartment a couple of miles away some of the time and we'd stay with George. We took turns among the three families, the Walter Meads, the Stanton Meads and the Henry Baldwins. We'd overlap a little sometimes.

George spent most of the winter down there and there were a lot of things happening around the company. Between the telephone and mail and probably one or two trips home in winter, he kept things rolling.

I entered Lincoln High School in the fall 1941. December 7, I remember, there was a full assembly in what was then the Lincoln field house on December 8 and we heard Franklin Roosevelt on the loudspeakers, "The day will live infamy," and all that.

Aaron Ritchay was the principal. Torresani, "Torrie," was there.

After a year, I went out east to a preparatory school called Hotchkiss. It's in northwestern Connecticut in the foothills of the Berkshire mountains. Went one year to Lincoln simply to get into that school. I needed Latin and algebra.

It wasn't my idea at all. My father went to Hotchkiss, my uncle Henry went there, Gil Dickerman was there, Walter went there, I think.

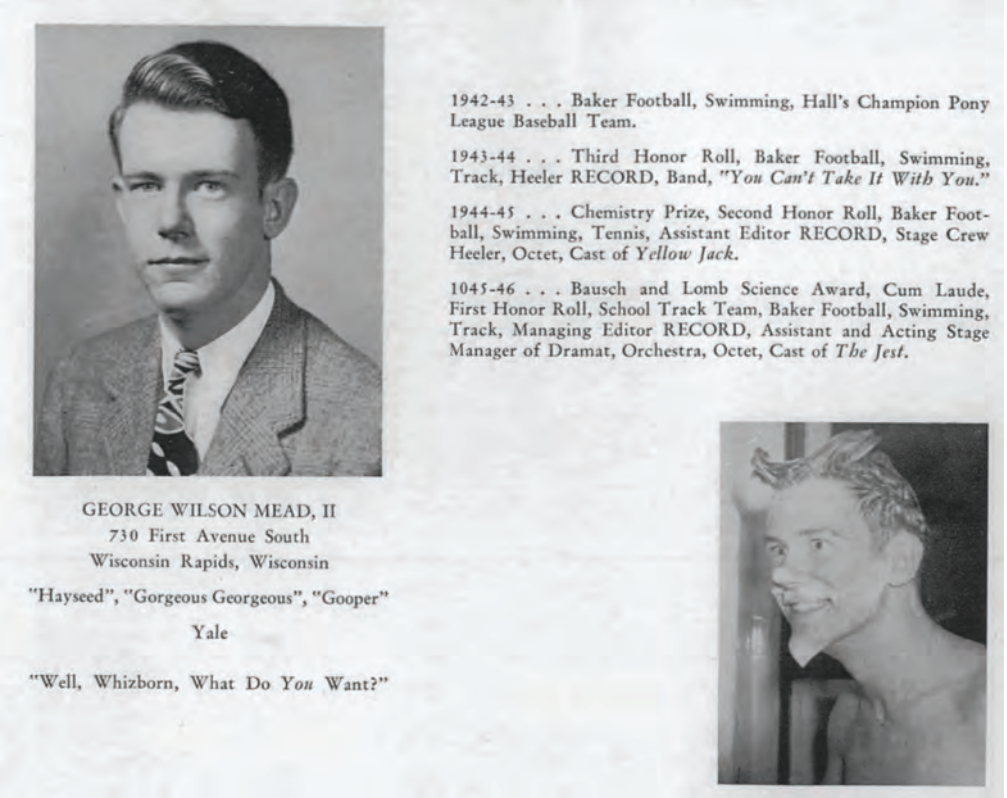
Going all the way out to Hotchkiss was tough. The only thing that saved me was I was a year older than the other kids, who had already had Latin and algebra in their schools in the East.

I picked up a nickname: "Hayseed."

A year later, a guy came in from St. Charles, Ill. He was worse and took over the nickname.

By the time I was a junior, I was getting good enough marks so I could go to New York City on my own.

At Hotchkiss 1946



GEORGE WILSON MEAD, II
730 First Avenue South
Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin
"Hayseed", "Gorgeous Georgeous", "Gooper"
Yale
"Well, Whizborn, What Do *You* Want?"

1942-43 . . . Baker Football, Swimming, Hall's Champion Pony League Baseball Team.

1943-44 . . . Third Honor Roll, Baker Football, Swimming, Track, Heeler RECORD, Band, *"You Can't Take It With You."*

1944-45 . . . Chemistry Prize, Second Honor Roll, Baker Football, Swimming, Tennis, Assistant Editor RECORD, Stage Crew Heeler, Octet, Cast of *Yellow Jack.*

1045-46 . . . Bausch and Lomb Science Award, Cum Laude, First Honor Roll, School Track Team, Baker Football, Swimming, Track, Managing Editor RECORD, Assistant and Acting Stage Manager of Dramat, Orchestra, Octet, Cast of *The Jest.*

I stayed with my roommate's parents and bummed around New York City. That's where I developed a deep understanding of Dixieland jazz, which is still my dear love.

The old hangouts down in Greenwich Village were Nick's and Eddie Condon's, places like that. I visited them many times. I was a junior in high school and it was during the war and nobody gave a damn. I went in the taverns all over New York City. The nice thing was, eighteen was the drinking law in New York City and I was seventeen and they didn't check.

I was on the swim team and the track team. As a senior I was a shot putter and we had a match with the first year at West Point, the plebes, so we got to go down to West Point have a track tournament and get lunch in their massive dining room. This was just at the end of the war.

Summers, I came home, where I became a lifeguard and swimming teacher at the pool, the old brown one. The water from the river flowed through. At Consolidated, we got bleach plant chlorine, hypochlorite from the mill, and dribbled it in all day to try to kill some bugs.

The one incident I remember the most, we had a problem with the pool. I think the gate was leaking so we shut it down for the day and we all went out to Wazeecha just for the fun of it. I was not officially at Wazeecha. I was just out swimming.

The son of the funeral director drowned [Allen G. Krohn, 1945]. There was a big fuss so those of us who were lifeguards went out and brought him in and tried to rescue him but he'd been down too long and we couldn't do it. I think with modern techniques we might have rescued him. He still had a pulse. We were using the old "press on the back" system and it didn't work. I did what I could but it wasn't enough. Felt terrible about it, but yes, that was the only one. We had no serious incidents at the pool. Nobody drowned on my watch when I was working.

I had been active in Boy Scouts, probably up through my freshman year at Lincoln, and never got past Second Class. I forget what happened. I just hung out with them when I came back. I went to a couple of my Lincoln reunions of the class I entered with and we're good friends to this day. Mary Lou Rodencal, Shirley Feih.

I had good friends in Rapids. It wasn't awkward. I saw them over the holidays. Came home Christmas, came home Easter. Hung around with them.

Graduated in '46. What happened at Hotchkiss was they were afraid I was going to get drafted so they moved me along and I ended up taking Calculus and some advanced courses. If I had got drafted in '45, they were prepared to give me a diploma. But I didn't get drafted. The war was over so I finished up with my class.

We had a jazz band when I was a senior at Hotchkiss and I was the bass player. I had joined the school orchestra for only one reason; I needed a bass to play in that jazz band.

We weren't very good. We played strictly amateur, or maybe a little bit for the guys. One day the head of the school orchestra walked by and saw me playing bass in that jazz band and I got kicked off the orchestra. So I went downtown and got a washtub and a stick and a string and made myself a bass and it didn't work very good, obviously. We had fun.

I sang in the chorus there and we got up a little eight-piece singing group as well. We were very proud of ourselves to be invited to be the entertainment at the Vassar freshman prom.

As I say, I graduated with honors, got a prize for an essay I wrote on the La Follettes for a history class. It was very positive. Oh yes, my granddad loved the La Follettes. I don't think I ever met any of them but I admired them a lot.

I was very active singing. The Yale Glee Club toured Europe the summer of 1949. I came home and got to know this girl and we just decided to get married after my junior year at Yale. She was a New Haven native named Helen.

We lived in a little apartment in New Haven for a year and had a child a year later. Deborah. She was born in July.

In 1950, I graduated from Yale. I had been accepted by the Institute of Paper Chemistry, in Appleton, which surprised my dad some.

I saw a brochure on the bulletin board from them and said, hey, maybe I should look at paper. Believe it or not.

We came here first and had the child and then I went over to Appleton.

I previously had one summer job working for Fred Kulp in the coating lab. I ran into somebody at the grocery store that said he remembered me in about 1949 being at the mill.

I was senior in college when I thought I'd see about working in the paper industry. I wasn't sure what I was going to do. Let's put it this way. Both my grandparents brainwashed me. That's a statement I've made many times and that's true yet.

Came back to Wisconsin, lived here in the summer to have my child born, Debbie. We moved to Appleton in the fall. We were among the first of the married students with children and they set up Quonset hut for us.

In 1951, Larry Murtfeldt said to me. "Do you want to come over and work at Consolidated?" I've always loved him for it, to be perfectly frank.

Then we moved over here, built the second house on Riverwood Lane. Jim Parsons built the first one.

David was born in Appleton in '51; Leslie was born here in 1954.

My training at the Institute was heavy in Chemical Engineering so I was hired on as a chemical engineer working with John Natwick in what was then a sulfite mill out here on Third Avenue. It's no longer there of course. He and I both worked for the same guy, Bill Prebbanow.

I did a lot of projects around the sulfite mill and then Gilbert Dickerman was technical director and he recruited me into the central laboratory where I ran pulp research for a couple years.

A lot of that had to do with the Appleton mill so I went over to Appleton a lot. I had worked for Consolidated at the Appleton mill the summer of '51 when I was in school over there.

Then I was made assistant production manager under Howard Richman, who was ill, as it turned out, and his wife was ill. Howard more and more was not coming into work regularly.

Suddenly he had to retire and somebody, I think Henry Baldwin, gave me the job of production manager. I remember coming into my dad's office and

telling him and he said, "Oh my god. They gave you that job?"

The mill had deteriorated due to my boss's illness. Quality wasn't good. We were losing money on the books. For the first year, it was tough but I had wonderful people helping me, like Ed Witt and Leo Reiman.

There were two strikes. When the mechanics were on strike, I had bought a car from old Doc Waters and it turned out he had a nice tool kit in its trunk.

So they asked me to fix a valve. I went out there and put a wrench on it and I couldn't bust the valve loose, it was rusted in.

I said, "I'll go get a bigger wrench but it's getting kind of late. Can you live with it until morning?"

Next day, I started to put that wrench on there and almost fell on my face. During the middle of the night, they had loosened it. They didn't want to see me hurt myself.

The next year, 1957, was the last time this company was shut down by a strike. Then I went out and helped ship paper, drove tow motor and that kind of thing. I was a salaried supervisor, so it was okay.

The '57 strike was simply a problem with personalities. Emil Noreen [union] and Leo Barrette [Consolidated] just didn't like each other.

We were out for two weeks and finally they came back. They had made their point.

When I became president, we had a pipefitters' strike. In 1966, they wanted construction wages. For steady jobs in the mill, you don't pay construction wages.

So they went out on construction.

After a year, they said, "We want to see Mr. Mead."

So I sat down and listened for an hour and the next day they came back to work.

Stanton Mead by UD

We've had really, really good union relations down here. We're all here. We all live in the same town. The big union rep, his office is in Plover, he lives in Rapids. I say hi to him when I see him and he says "Hi George." That's the way it ought to be.

About '58 or '59, they yanked me out of the Rapids Mill and made me product manager so I could go up to Biron and straighten out that mill. My dad, Stanton, as president, was very conservative but two things happened on his watch that were terribly important to this company. One was the upgrading of the Biron and Wisconsin River mills when *Time* and *Life* and people like that were getting much more demanding on quality. Starting in the fifties, I put in blade coaters at Wisconsin River Division, Biron and Rapids. It was a monstrous changeover from our basic Massey coater that was the heart and soul of this company.

I think it was 1963 that I became Vice President of Operations, with Larry Murtfeldt, my mentor, becoming underneath me now. I'd hopped over him as Vice President of Manufacturing. Harold Murtfeldt was sales manager. I started shipping paper down to *Readers' Digest*, the first coated paper they'd ever used.

The other thing we did was building the Kraft mill. My dad was in love with sulfite.

God, my dad hated what was happening, but basis weights were dropping. Paper wasn't 45 pounds and more; it was 43 pound and so then it was 40 pound. The paper wasn't strong enough. The Kraft paper was immensely stronger than sulfite. So we were buying this stuff during my product development days.

I kept nagging at him. "God, we should be making our own. We shouldn't be buying all this pulp."

Finally, he came to me and said, "George, I have decided where the Kraft mill is gonna go."

Mead, right, with Gov. Warren Knowles at Kraft Mill groundbreaking, April 1966

I was so thrilled we were going ahead that I didn't argue with him on the location. What a mistake! It should have been half-way between here and Biron, away from most everybody.

That was '65 probably, maybe '64. We started up in '66. He had retired by the time we actually got it going.

Dad had just retired and I was just barely president of the company. I caught a little hell from the board. The Kraft mill was about three months late and about two million dollars over budget. We cut dividends again and my own cash flow dropped like a stone. I was poor and the whole damn town was mad at me. This board of directors, very conservative, very scared, saw this loan coming due.

And then the Kraft mill started up and everything settled down and we prepaid the damn loan ahead of time. God! Here everybody was mad at me and it turned out just fine.

Then came the recession of '71. All the charts were so obvious. Not just Consolidated. All across the country. Harold Murtfeldt came up here and became president that year. I moved to chairman.

As soon as we reorganized, everything was fine. We started making lots of money again during the Seventies.

The company is a damn good company, David, and I'm proud of some things. We're such a professionally managed company today with such depth of talent that weren't here when I came in 1952. We did very well in recruiting people right out of school in those days. I brought in Pat Caruso and Roy Engelhardt to improve our financial control and our labor relations and personnel practices.

The skill level of the hourly employee today is tremendously higher. They have to be, because they're all running things with computers.

Consolidated and Wisconsin Rapids? Here we are! Symbiotic. Because the headquarters is here.

Part of this is because of my grandparents. Both my grandfathers loved the town and they did a lot for it.

I can recall my granddad being quite dramatic in the community, at least the history of it. He built the high school and all those things. In his era, he made some decisions and this was what was going to happen.

Then we went into a cycle under my father when I first became involved in community affairs. I've been an exalted ruler of the Elks and a trustee of the church and did all the things you're supposed to do. But there was more of a passive feeling of, "Let the community tell us what's going on and we'll see if we want to help."

My mother, Dorothy, was active in female things in clubs and things like that. She and Emily [Mead Baldwin] kind of shared the leadership position that my grandmother had until she died. We had club meetings at the house my mother would run. So she was a very good golfer.

She and Emily were great rivals on the golf course. But I think, friendly ones. She encouraged me, is the best way to put it. She was a great encourager but she died in 1966.

My aunt became conservative later on. I can recall her saying, when we were going to give some money for the clock tower, "Oh, we don't need a Clock Tower." That's a great addition to the community.

Now, I think we're switching back a little more. I think we're deliberately and correctly getting a little more proactive. I think we're saying, "Okay, let's see what we can do."

Downtown Wisconsin Rapids is a big worry to us, to be perfectly frank. It's not been going the right direction.

McMillan Memorial Library dedication, Mugs McCourt, Edith Dudgeon, head librarian, left. Mary McMillan Burt at podium. Long-time McMillan benefactor George Mead II standing by. June 1968. *Daily Tribune/SWCHC*

I'm talking about the Consolidated Foundation and to a certain degree the company itself. I think Buck [Evans] is a little more involved in the community than Pat [Brennan] was and I think he's taking a greater interest in how we are going to live downtown and whether there'll be enough parking and everything. I think we're going to try to do things a little more proactively, a little more positively, try to help.

I'm not sure what the final result is going to be. I just know that we have got to keep trying. By putting in that little park where the Wisconsin Theater used to be, we've kind of moved in the right direction. Some people say the loss of that façade was a great loss. Well, maybe, maybe not. There was nothing inside worth saving. At least, now you have some grass and some benches which don't get used much. It's hard to say right now.

My granddad, and I did a little of it, cleaned up the riverbanks. Got the old rotten Witter hotel out across from here. I was involved in the stretch between the two bridges here. I went over to see George Holloway one day at the Wood County Bank and I said, "George there's a federal program that if we can put up a hundred thousand dollars we can clean up that river bank."

I said, 'Would you object, those people are all your customers?"

He said, "I'd love it. Let's do it."

He put up fifty grand. Consolidated put up fifty grand and we did it. I'm proud of it. That was a nice thing to do. It's a nice riverbank.

I get asked all the time by out-of-towners. Are we going to keep going? The Elks and that. I say, "Wait a minute, the town likes those buildings."

I want Wisconsin Rapids to be a nice place. That's somewhat selfish in that I live here and that the company lives here. It's good for the company for this to be a nice town.

I used to go down to the Brig. I bet I played standup bass down there. It was Dick's father, Spider, would play and Goggins.

Goggins was the "in" bass player in those days. We had the piano player. It was the old Castillians, basically. That's a long time ago.

I love walking through the mill. I love walking through the plants, all of them, including our newly acquired ones. I remember I went out to Niagara the day we took possession. I says, "Well, you have to get used to it. We tend to walk around a lot."

I was never a golfer. Golf, you see, is the businessman's sport and my family, my mother, my father, my granddad founded Bulls Eye Country Club. I tried playing golf when I came to town. I never was any good at it so I just got embarrassed and quit.

I was active in the Republicans for a little while when I first came to town. I worked with Kasten when he ran. I worked with the Seventh District a little bit. Then I threw up my hands. I wasn't doing any good. I got to know Dave Obey. Finally, Dave and I got to like each other, and Marlin Schneider and I are good friends.

I became less dogmatic and more pragmatic. You know, I had the background of a very Democratic grandfather. My mother just kept her mouth shut. Emily and Henry were very vigorous, active Republicans. I've always figured I was pretty neutral and open-minded and voted for the person I thought was the most appropriate. You take our two Democratic senators: are you sure they're Democrats? They're certainly very conservative, both of them.

I've thought about running for office but I never had the time and the career was too demanding. I went to see Lee Dreyfus once and said that I was going to work against him and I was sort of apologizing. I said I was going to work for Kasten in that gubernatorial campaign.

I said, "You know I've often thought of running for governor."

He says, "George, you run for governor. I'll be your campaign manager. I'll withdraw right now."

You'll see me in Copps' great grocery store pretty regularly. I like to shop and I like to cook. I'm a reader. I love to listen to music. Put a record on, you read. I'm not a TV watcher outside of the Packers. I have season tickets for the Packers and I watch them on TV regularly. Average tennis player but I love it. Max Andrae can whip my butt. A lot of people can whip my butt. I'm a good skier but my knees are getting bad. Seventy years old and I've got a jock injury; bone spurs in my knees.

Weary docents: George Mead II and J. Marshall Buehler, at Mead-Witter papermaking museum

The death of George Mead II (1927-2022), marks the end of the Age of Paper here. At the time of the 1997 interview, Consolidated Papers, Inc., was three years from its sale to a multinational, the Finnish/Swedish conglomerate Stora-Enso (2000). The Wisconsin Rapids mill was closed by Verso corporation in 2020 and stands vacant in 2022.

Wed in 1990 to George Mead II, Wisconsin Rapids native Susan Feith, head of the Mead Witter Foundation, continues to implement the beautification projects mentioned here.

Being a Mead in Wisconsin Rapids puts you in a fish bowl, you know that. That's why there's none of them here but me anymore. The ones that tried, it's just impossible. Thick skin, ignore it. I was brought up with it but so were my kids and they didn't like it. Maybe I'm just not that sensitive.

We have a guy named Chuck Bigelow who does personnel for us. I finally took him aside about three months ago. He's been here maybe ten years now.

I said, "Will you please stop calling me Mr. Mead?"

"What should I call you?"

"George, like everybody else."

"Okay."

He's having an awful time doing it, but he's managing.

I prefer George, I still get George from some of the youngsters out in the mill once in a while and that's great, I love that. This is a first name town.

George Mead II
1997 photo by UD

South Wood County Historical Museum
540 Third Street South
Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494

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32 *Before he was Uncle.* Dave Engel "between the two bridges" at the block about to be razed for the project described in the George Mead interview here.