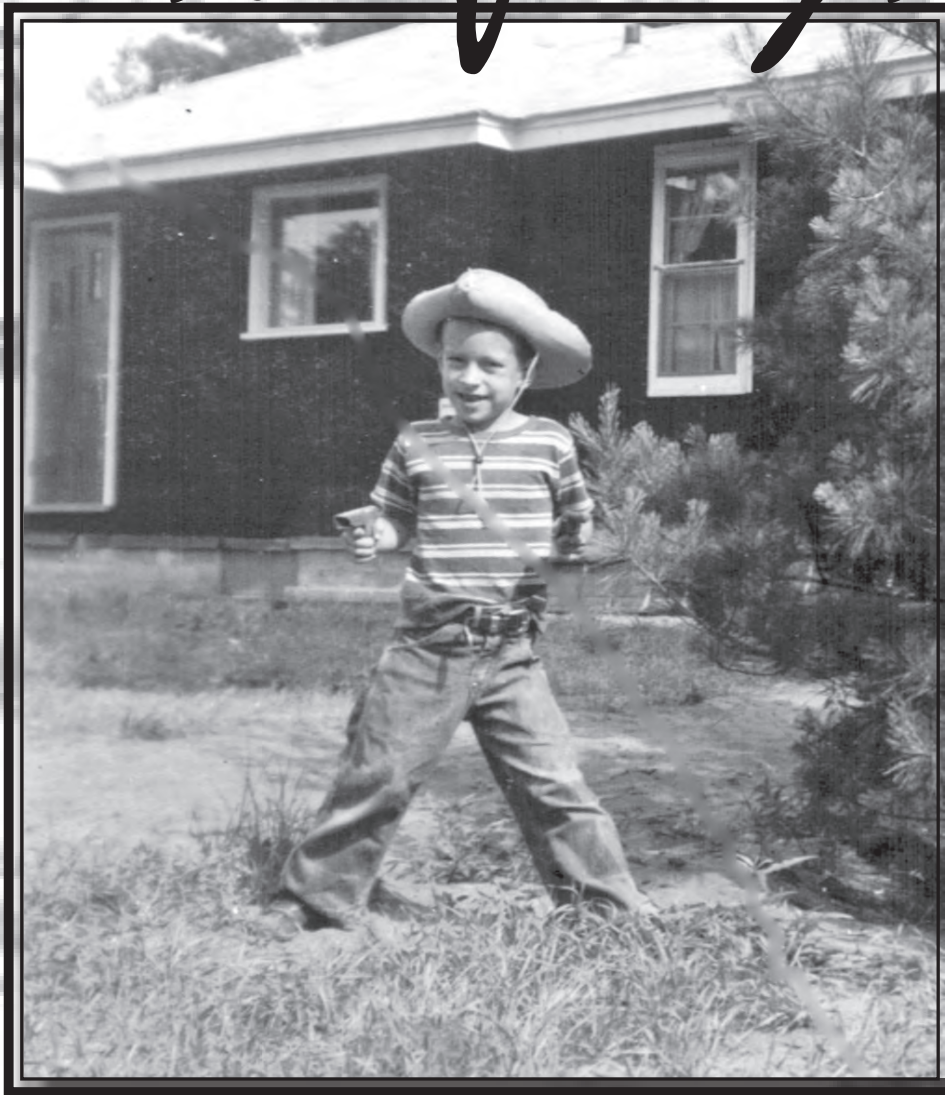


Dave Engel

Ghost of Myself



RIVER CITY MEMOIRS VII

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River City Memoirs VII: *Ghost of Myself* is a collection of stories previously published in the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune* 1998-2008. This limited edition is available only to supporters of the South Wood County Historical Corp. publication fund.

Commendation to : Phil Brown, SWCHC; Lori Brost, SWCHC; Kathy Engel, MSPT; Allen Hicks, *Daily Tribune*; Holly (Pearl) Knoll, assistant editor; Daniel P. Meyer, patron saint; Warren Miller, Print Shop.

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You're either part of the solution or part of the problem.

Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1998)



Dave Engel & Diedrich Knickerbocker

"What important beings are we historians! We are the sovereign censors who decide upon the renown or infamy of our fellow mortals—we are the benefactors of kings—we are the guardians of truth—we are the scourgers of guilt—we are the instructors of the world—we are—in short, what we are not!"

Diedrich Knickerbocker

From the first River City Memoirs 1983

The title “River City Memoirs,” comes from the history major I almost was at Point college □ and to the 80 per cent of readers who prefer me that way: the gray-bearded, prosaic, fact-filled, “Uncle Dave.” The bulk of my stories have been in the history category. They are my gift to you.

The reason I didn’t finish a major in history is that I couldn’t remember the first seven (or nine?) U.S. colleges in the order they were founded, providing early evidence that I wasn’t a match for that nit-picky world. So I took the path more traveled □ by those with bad memories for details and a headful of big ideas □ to the department of English, a discipline (or lack of discipline) where ghosts are popular and so is the concept of “myself.”

Thus, the English major half of the book title and that part of the book, “Ghost of Myself,” goes out to the 20 per cent of you who appreciate me under my Mid-State Poetry Towers beret. Providing a readership for columns like this is your gift to me.

Both the History and English people have witnessed the struggle to explain this dichotomy, as in this passage, published well before the New Millennium: “When David, his unbuckled overshoes snagging, tramped along the ridge of snow banks from Two Mile School in the spring of 1953, the ghost of himself was with him, taking notes for later reference. When Dave leaned on a lamp post, smoking Salems and watching hot rods drag up Grand Avenue, he was not alone.”

But so much for the English major side of life. For History, I took a look at the 1959 *Tribune* (fifty years ago), and sampled references that are part of the disappeared world the ghosts of my generation had lived in.

Like the Rapids Theatre.

It was just behind my lamp post on Grand, on this particular night featuring the “Mysterians,” in which scary space monsters chase shapely human females around the block.

Next door, the Friendly Fountain, where good girls didn’t go, and Perry’s Sport Shop, where bad boys bought baseball gloves, boat cushions and Chinese slingshots.

Kitty-corner upstream on 2nd Street was the Sugar Bowl restaurant and candy shop. After midnight in the 1960s, I watched a righteously humungous rat bound from the vicinity of the Sugar Bowl, no doubt flushed out by the radar cooking inside — one of those moments I knew would come back to haunt me.

The nicest theater was the Wisconsin, on West Grand, advertising the always palindromic Ava Gardner in “The Naked Maja.” A post-show snack could be had at Wilpolt’s pretty nice restaurant, offering the “biggest egg whip in captivity.”

The biggest screen in 1959 was to be found at the Highway 13 “outdoor,” with Jerry Lewis cavorting in “The Geisha Boy.” On Buck Night, an entire carload of hijinks for one dollar.

For the worst generation, there was Clarence and Helen Molepske’s Riverside bar, where I, a few years later, was to join friends for great Saturday nights.

In a typical sendup of the fads of youth, the 1959 *Tribune* lampooned a cultural phenomenon we now know presaged the collapse of conventional moral values.

“Beatniks, in case you don’t dig the term, are a curious collection of queerly dressed convention-haters in full flight from the world and in fresh pursuit of art. They express themselves by flailing bongo drums and by painting and writing — and sometimes, apparently, just by sitting in bathtubs.”

We had one beatnik in town. When he was absent, my friend Mike and I explored his “pad” and I know a couple of his abstract art compositions ended up in the SWCHC Museum. Also still around are my own bongo drums.

But it’s time to tie up the ghost.

I once wrote, “It is an evening in July 1945 and the world is taking a turn.” But it was actually October 1995, and I was, English-major-like, looking over my father’s shoulder, in a small “hotel” above a downtown Wisconsin Rapids tavern, where he penned a letter for my mother-to-be, who waited in Manitowoc, Wis.

The attempt to explain the way I felt about all this hastened my hiatus from the *Daily Tribune*. “You’re getting pretty far out,” the editor told me.

Yeah, that’s right. Next thing you know, it was, “Got’m” and a one-way ticket to never-never land.

Spooky stuff. That’s what English majors do.

October 2009

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1950



New home construction, Two Mile Avenue

South Wood County Historical Corp. presents

River City Memoirs, The Fifties

The Wisconsin Rapids area in the 1940s is the subject of The Home Front, a River City Memoirs book published in 1999 by the South Wood County Historical Corp. with a grant from the Community Foundation of South Wood County. Here, under SWCHC sponsorship, the series continues into the 1950s. [As published in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune]

1950/50 Years Ago

Timeline

It was a happy coincidence that *Daily Tribune* columnist Mark Scarborough happened to be with me at the Grand Avenue Tavern when the woman of mystery appeared. Who was she and where was she from? Switzerland? Scotland? Seattle?

She seemed to speak several languages. In an accent I couldn't place, she quoted early 20th century American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay.

My candle burns at both ends;

It will not last the night;

But, ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—

It gives a lovely light!

After a little prompting, the woman confirmed that she actually was "from here" and had graduated from Lincoln High School in 1955. She said she had preserved the recent *Tribune*/South Wood County Historical Corp. memorial tribute to former Lincoln High School teacher Alice Hayward, and even as we

spoke didn't realize Mark and I were the authors.

"Who did you know back then?"

She mentioned Ann Pomainville, Skip Wefel, Lee Kauth. "I'm trying to think of people who still live here."

Later that night, I thought of Ellen Sabetta, longtime curator of the 3rd Street South historical museum, as I reached for the 1955 *Ahdawagam*, Lincoln's yearbook. Twenty years ago, Ellen had looked *me* up.

Wow!

She was lovely, this Emeline Chambers (transferred from Ashland, Ky.) and active: Badger Girls' State; Dramatic Club; GAA; National Honor Society; editor of *Lincoln Lights*. A few pages later: her portrait enlarged to half a page, "Miss LHS."

To her right: "Mr. LHS," Lee Kauth.

The following day, I called on Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools, where Kauth was filling in as director of business services, a post he had held prior to retirement. From his desk in an addition to the same Lincoln building we had

both attended, he said, sure, he remembered Emeline. She was one of those popular classmates who disappeared after graduation.

Kauth said Emeline had lived near Howe School. Her father was with the Nash and Podvin law office. Her brother also was an attorney.

So how do you get to be Miss or Mr. LHS? "People active in organizations, voted on by students in the class," Kauth said.

Miss and Mr. LHS presided in a decade sometimes called innocent, the '50s, when most students lived close enough to walk to Lincoln, now East Junior High; when a strict dress code was in effect for students and teachers, and if you got in trouble, Mom and Dad heard about it before you got home.

Friday night games and dances, and maybe a short walk downtown to the Friendly Fountain; that was burning your candle at both ends. Miss and Mr. LHS were royalty from a past in which I, too, had a part. However my personal title, "Mr. LHS" was more accurately translated as, "Loiter here, Stupid."

Fifty years ago this year, my dad inscribed “1950” in the wet concrete of the top basement step of our new home, along with the names Don, Sally, David, Kathryn, Gary. Later, he chiseled in Ken, born in 1955, the year Emeline and Lee graduated.

We were part of a population explosion that echoed the atom bombs of WWII. As the time line ticked through 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, there was such a building boom that you needed ear-plugs.

My first home had been a cramped apartment near St. Lawrence School, an easy walk for my dad to his stockroom job at the Frank Garber plumbing and welding supply company. From the west side we moved to a garage that Dad, by then employed by Consolidated, built on Clyde Avenue, near 8th Street. He had intended to add a house but decided instead to follow the wave of development farther out.

While working on the next house, we rented – also on Clyde Avenue, just north of Grove school on the edge of the “Sand Hill” that began at the railroad tracks. It was known as a tough neighborhood. A Sand Hill boy stole my bicycle, and another, whose parents owned the corner grocery, threatened my sister until I socked him in the gut, and he went home crying. There was no indoor toilet, and the heat failed frequently, so we wrapped up in blankets. When we were sick, Dr. Handy came personally to administer penicillin shots and Karo syrup in salt water. There is a *Tribune* photo-

graph of this residence in the midst of a seasonal flowage that flooded Clyde.

“Luedtke Acres,” between Cook and Two Mile avenues, and between Lincoln and Sampson streets, was advertised by Winn and Murgatroyd Realtors as one of the “Most Desirable and Fastest Growing Developments”—“The Quiet of the Country and the Convenience of Town.” Our lot was west of the still-existing Endrizzi water wheel, between the Caves and Butz houses and across from Murgatroyd’s.

The permit for the \$6,500 “ranch” was signed by Grand Rapids building inspector Harry Rucinski. My dad, with a little help, was building the brick-veneered house himself. That’s the way they did it then.

Moving to the edge of town, we joined a movement described at the time by columnist Hal Boyle. “The next step is to pave the farmlands, leaving the United States one vast sea of concrete and asphalt, studded with parks, suburban lawns—and billboards.” To accommodate the outflow here: Children’s Choice School on 48th Street, sporting the familiar “modern” box look favored by Donn Hougen, local architect.

Likewise, St. Luke’s Lutheran dedicated what was said to be the first church building ever constructed in the “century-old town of Grand Rapids,” at 10th Street and Wood Avenue, the Rev L.F. Schneider presiding.

Twelve below—on the night in 1950 that city police officers Franklin Smith and Donald Knuth discovered a fire on the upper East Side.

Knuth recalled the event in a year 2000 South Wood County Historical Corp. interview. “Near Love Street, we could smell wood burning. Smitty quick turned in the alleyway by the Rapids Beverage Co. About then, a ball of fire come out of the building: boom!”

Besides the 1910 structure and a 1940 addition, a sticky mish-mash of candy, soda pop, beer, cigarettes, and matches was consumed. About the same time, a “flash fire at the W.F. Warsinske repair garage on 8th Street South was doused with garden hoses supplied by neighbor John Dove and run from the house of Warsinske employee Walter Nystrom, 640 Clyde Ave.

In the winter of 50 years ago, the thermometer at the Nepco Lake power station registered minus 42, about as cold as it gets here. With temperatures continuing below zero, a boiler failure left the Wood County Home for the Aged without heat, and 47 residents were evacuated to the memorial Armory and five to Riverview Hospital for a 12-day stay while the old folks’ home heaters were repaired.

Fifty years ago, the focal point of the community was the imposing Lincoln High School Fieldhouse, used for basketball games, track meets, musical productions, public “forums,” the heart of Wisconsin Sport Show (the 1950 version featuring live mink from the fur farm of J.E. and Don Gazeley, east of Nekoosa), and variety programs such as the Lions Club Minstrel Show.

Speaking of lions, the intimidating

beast known as the “Rudolph lion” was shot and killed by Franklin Langer in the Ten Mile Creek area. According to witnesses, the 3-foot-long Canadian lynx “seemed much larger when we first saw it.” Speaking of Rudolph, the community high school enjoyed a gala homecoming and basketball game.

Speaking of buckets, LHS grad and college senior Bob Mader, called the best prep guard ever to compete at the University of Wisconsin fieldhouse, played guard on the UW basketball team in 1950. Speaking of Maders, older brother Jerry had competed in the 1941 state prep tournament and younger brother Johnny was, in 1950, on the Lincoln team. “When the Maders ran out of sons in the growing process, a new ‘tagger’ was in order,” said the *Tribune*, “and that role is now filled by young Pat Daly.

Mader teammates on the high school team were Boola Gill, Jimmy Ritchay, Don Brewster, and Charlie Gurtler. Their winning streak in the Valley conference was halted at 26 games by an arch rival, the unbeaten Stevens Point Panthers, led by Dick Cable. The Lincoln Red Raiders would rise to bigger things another year.

At times, high school basketball in 1950 resembled the millennial NBA. The *Tribune* described a game with Nekooosa (then of the same Wisconsin Valley Conference), in which players, dressed in “customary basketball garb,” applied half-Nelsons, threw “a variety of blocks and tackles that would have done justice

to a pro football team,” employed the flying wedge and the off-tackle smash, and in general departed “from the finessence of true basketball.”

Speaking of a few other residents in the news in early 1950:

Norway native and ski champ Ole Arneson directed a jump tournament at Dyracuse Mound; his seven children were “following in his tracks.”

Harold “Honey Boy” Sullivan and Herb Ruder boxed in a revival of Golden Gloves tournaments, including an exhibition between Honey Boy’s sons, Billy and Pat Sullivan.

Russell A. Peterson returned to his private airstrip in Grand Rapids after a 5,000-mile Cessna Caravan flight to Guatemala with Morris A. Wolcott.

Van Kubisiak ran for mayor, serving as an anachronistic reminder that it was Mayor James Kubisiak who appointed the first official honorary municipal historian of “River City.”

August C. Miller, the only fire chief Wisconsin Rapids ever had, retired. He had been appointed in 1920, when a full time fire department was established.

Leo J. Barrette was named “first annual” citizen of the year, largely for spearheading the building of the baseball stadium that still stands at Witter athletic field.

Edward Kanieski, 31, pleaded guilty to breaking into the home of a 76-year-old town of Saratoga woman, who then shot him. He was sentenced to Waupun state prison by Judge Byron B. Conway.

“The iron is set too high. Don’t put it on where it says ‘Linen’ or it will scorch the linen.” These are the last words written by the candle poet cited earlier, “Vincent” Millay.

“Try it on ‘Rayon’ and then, perhaps on ‘Woollen.’”

Her self-composed requiem came in a note to a neighbor who would arrive later to help with housework. “And be careful not to burn your fingers when you shift it from one heat to another.”

Millay died alone and was found seated, head bowed, on the staircase of her house in upstate New York. “It is 5:30, and I have been working all night. I am going to bed.”

She was 58.

The date was Oct. 19.

The year was that same fateful, 50 years ago, mid-century mark we have been revisiting all day.

The year was 1950.

10-14-00

Korea

Wish I were more like H. L. Mencken. Though I never met him, I did write a masters thesis about the legendary “iconoclast” who wasn’t afraid to speak his mind, especially when deflating hypocrites.

Fifty years ago today, Mencken, 70, was confined to a Baltimore, Md., hospital after a near-fatal heart attack. According to our *Daily Tribune*, he was drinking an imported beer and calling for a cigar.

Fifty years. On June 25, 1950, troops from Communist North Korea invaded South Korea. The United Nations called the invasion a violation of international peace. The U.S. sent troops to defend South Korea; Communist China and Russia backed the North Koreans.

An August *Tribune* photo showed 79 Wood county men answering the first draft call since the outbreak of Korean hostilities. The first Wisconsin Rapids casualty was Pfc. Richard J. Ashenbrenner, 19, with a hand injury.

On August 29, Pfc. Neal W. Haferman was reported missing in action, according to a war department telegram received by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Haferman, 1111 11th Ave. N. The next day, Marine S. Sgt. August Tessmer, Jr., was reported wounded in action by his mother, Mrs. Irene Menz, 940 17th Avenue S. Tessmer had fought at Saipan, Okinawa and Iwo Jima in World War II.

The first Wisconsin Rapids serviceman killed as a result of the “Korean War” was Lt. James G. Prebbanow, 25. His death came when a U.S. air force plane crashed Sept. 24 in Japan. WWII veteran Prebbanow was an air force pilot.

Hal Boyle, a national columnist, called attention to a Rapids “GI” in action along the Nakdong River near Wae-gwan. When the South Koreans outlined a target area and called for help, Lt. Col. Glenn Rogers turned to air control officer, Lt. Howard J. Landry, of Wisconsin Rapids: “Okay, tell your boys to give that mountain a haircut.”

“Roger,” said Landry and ran to his jeep radio to contact mustangs and jets which were over the area.

“They’ll be here in five minutes,” Landry reported.

Onlookers could see planes swoop down repeatedly and could hear the clatter of their 50-caliber machine guns raking the “crags” for the hidden “Reds.”

Landry came in to report the air attack had been successful. “They really clobbered that hill,” he said.

As the battle continued in Korea, Theodore W. Brazeau, Wisconsin Rapids attorney, replied to a circular letter sent out by the Communist party of Wisconsin. “I am one of those who grew up from poverty and know the advantages this country has given its citizens and appreciate the liberty I am enjoying. I would not care to be in the Russian bondage and I cannot appreciate its persecution and disregard of human rights.”

It was a non-Presidential election

year; Harry Truman had been elected in 1948 and would serve two more years.

In April, more than doubling the votes of Robert A. Bablitch, Stevens Point, Herbert A. Bunde, Wisconsin Rapids, was elected to a six-year term as circuit judge. Bunde had grown up in a small logging town near Glidden and, in 1990, provided his reminiscences for the *River City Memoirs* book, *Shanagolden: An Industrial Romance*.

Carl C. Knudsen was reelected to a second term as mayor of Wisconsin Rapids over former alderman Van C. Kubisiak.

John J. Jeffrey displaced Harold D. Billmeyer as city attorney. In winning, Jeffrey lost a bet and owed a free wheelbarrow ride down West Grand Avenue to Richard Paulson “with Jeffrey supplying the necessary motive power.”

In November, among Republicans (who won all nine local contests): sheriff Arthur M. Boll; assemblyman W.W. Clark; clerk of circuit court Jasper C. Johnson; district attorney John M. Potter; and register of deeds Robert J. Ryan. Democrats, said the *Tribune*, polled higher numbers than usual in the “traditionally Republican county,” “particularly in the industrial Tri-City area.”

In the same election, Wisconsin Rapids city clerk Nels M. Justeson lost a bid for secretary of state to Fred R. Zimmerman.

Voters approved referenda to purchase voting machines for the city and to maintain the public zoo that had been established two years previous.

“Mayor Knudsen Stalks Out.”

An unsympathetic November *Tribune* said Knudsen abandoned ship “after alderman James Hanneman asked him pointedly, ‘Is this a dictatorship or is it a democracy?’” For his part, Knudsen had lectured, “This is no kindergarten. You fellows came here to work. If you don’t want to do that why don’t you stay home?”

Sometimes known as the Polish Catholic church, St. Lawrence observed its 50th anniversary Sept. 24.

Under construction was SS. Peter & Paul Catholic church. Designed by A.F. Billmeyer & Son and built by Frank H. Henry, it would replace the existing frame building dating from 1873,

The new Assembly of God Gospel Tabernacle at 550 Baker Street was dedicated. The congregation, established in 1927, had been located at the G.A.R. hall and the old Moravian church on Third Avenue North.

One of the worst fires in Wisconsin Rapids history destroyed the block-long Frank Gill Paint factory on Love Street, even bigger than the Rapids Beverage conflagration in January of the same year—just a few hundred feet away.

Pre-draft age young people didn’t pay a lot of attention to the war or to the antics of their elders. Coach Phil Manders’ “gridders” won four of six games, losing to “perennial champion” Wausau and “defending champion Stevens Point,” according to the *Ahdawagam* yearbook.

Players Jerry Raasch, end, and John Trier, guard, were named to the all-conference football team with second-

team honors to Dick Jung, Jim Ritchay and Jack Billmeyer.

At undefeated St. Norbert college, De Pere, the season’s leading rusher was 185-pound “squat speedster,” John Ritchay, averaging over 10 yards per carry.

Preliminary figures from the bureau of census counted the population of Wisconsin Rapids at 13,518, a gain of 2,102 or 18 per cent, which was less than the increase of 2,790 or 30 per cent from 1930 to 1940.

The 1940 total for the Town of Grand Rapids was 2,358; in 1950 it was 4,137.

Adding five to the total was my own family. We had moved from the urban west side, first to Clyde Avenue and, in 1950, to Two Mile Avenue, at the edge of the new subdivisions.

Affecting lands just south of my Two Mile Avenue home, a game refuge was created by Wisconsin conservation commission on lands surrounding Nepco Lake. Tracts owned by Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co., John E. Alexander, Mrs. Sue M. Kibby and Louis and Quesnal Gross were included.

To us, it had been there forever; but in the 1950s, Lake Wazeecha, upstream from Nepco, was practically a brand new body of water. It had been completed and named in 1938.

The “white beach” and “red beach” were clean and welcoming. The developed lake banks provided a shaded setting for family picnics. I especially liked the swings by the red beach from which you could leap and fly far down the sandy “cliff.”

For children under age 14, the Wood County Conservation league supervised a fish pond in a north shore lagoon. Two foot bridges would bring children near to the 2,000 panfish stocked by Fred Jacobson, Wood county conservation warden.

At Powers Bluff county park, a two-story stone-and-concrete warming house and recreation building was ready, according to Emil Mueller, superintendent of Wood County parks.

“What about those Green Bay Packers?” wrote Chris Edmonds, Milwaukee, in a *Tribune* column. Under the only coach they ever had, E.L. “Curly” Lambeau, the Packers had been in a slump that had my mother recalling the better days of Hutson, Herber and Hinkle.

“But this gang is different,” Edmonds said. “The pro football team with the college try” owed its spirit to new coach Gene Ronzani, from Iron Mountain, Mich., not far from Green Bay.

Contributing to a close, family-like atmosphere, the coach was known to help out at the ticket window when needed.

A lot of fans felt Lambeau had ruined the team and were happy to see him gone. Yet, the “curly-thatched Belgian” was to appear at another Packer game all right. This time, as coach of the team he had joined after resigning from the Packers, the rival Chicago Cardinals.

11-11-00

Christmas on the Avenue

Want to make this coming Christmas the best and happiest you have ever experienced?

Then you must take Santa's advice: Don't lose a single moment. Don't be lulled into careless thinking by a glance at the calendar. Better start your Christmas shopping now! It's getting late. It's already Wednesday, Nov. 22.

1950.

Nov. 24, 1950.

Friday morning. Santa arrives for a parade across the bridge to the East Side and back to the free movies at the Wisconsin theater where he distributes "surprises" to children and collects letters addressed to himself. The *Tribune*: "Santa Claus has come to Wisconsin Rapids, his great gift bag overflowing, his eyes twinkling a heart warming invitation for everyone to lose no time in coming downtown to see his wonderful collection of mid-century gifts."

"A great corps of assistants has unloaded the contents of his overflowing gift pack, spread them on gaily bedecked counters and shelves in stores of our city, to await your admiring inspection. Santa Claus has come to town early so that none need lack the chance to make the 1950 Yuletide the most perfect in all history for their friends and loved ones."

7:15 Friday night: It looks like broad daylight after Cranboree Queen Donna Schelvan Haessly, with a wave of her silver wand, switches on Grand Avenue's new mercury vapor street lamps for the first time.

Mayor C.C. Knudsen dedicates the revamped pavement and lighting: "We ask the blessing of that great architect above, who made it possible for this street to be a street of truth, justice and happiness."

While American productivity provides a bounty of "exciting, beautiful and practical gifts," there are *many more people to give them to* than ever before, so more time is needed to shop. The newer and more exciting gifts disappear quickly and those who delay are "out of luck."

Saint Nick, aided by 20th century progress, has "transformed what once were considered prosaic items, into glittering new gifts, and has brought into existence new devices for work saving, and entertainment for the whole family."

Many of the advances of 1950 are plastic: "realistic reproductions in miniature of devices used in the practical world." Big sellers are dolls that act, talk and toddle like real live babies. "Many have soft-to-the-touch skin textures that will make little girls squeal with happiness."

An important East Side anchor is the J.C. Penney store at 130 2nd St. S. Yet another of its numerous grand openings sports fluorescent lighting, an enlarged office and new color schemes, fixtures, tile floor and tables.

The Penney concern had been established 30 years previous as the *Golden Rule*, across the street. "Ever since the store first opened here it has suffered from growing pains necessitating several changes in location and remodeling projects," says the *Tribune*.

Joe G. Hagen is the Penney manager and has been since the beginning. (See *River City Memoirs II*.) Hagen is proud that James Cash Penney himself, founder of the company, visited the local store in 1936.

The problem with Penney's to a five-year-old boy such as me? It's nothing but socks and underwear.

Suppose you weren't permitted to go to church this Christmas. Or weren't allowed to sing "Joy to the World," even in a hushed voice? Or suppose you weren't allowed to

trim a tree or buy the kids any toys; would you still shout a hearty "Merry Christmas" to your friends when you met them on the Avenue?

Or if a special decree went out from your government that you should not observe Christmas in any way, would you still do so?

The questions are posed in the *Daily Tribune* of Saturday, Dec. 23, 1950.

Yes, concludes the writer, Christian hearts will always observe Christmas, even in the face of a hostile totalitarian government.

Some places, Christmas doesn't come easy.

Latvia, in northern Europe on the Baltic Sea, wedged between Estonia and Lithuania, is an unwilling part of the Soviet Union. After their takeover in 1940, the Russians abolished private ownership of property. All farms were communized and the Latvians had to work for the state, paid with a share of the produce of their land. The Russians forbade the celebration of all national and church holidays—difficult for a people known for their enjoyment of singing.

Through the machinations of several governments, some Latvians found their way to other places. Arriving in central Wisconsin, sponsored by Bethany and First English Lutheran churches: the families of Janis (John) Knostenbergs, Janis Zarins and Arnold Pupols.

In Latvian villages, the newcomers say, Christmas had been a tradition. Behind trimmed windows, storekeepers displayed toys, bright lights and ornaments. The post office and opera house were also decorated.

Baking began several days before Christmas, the old wood stove turning

out cakes, cookies and white bread.

On Christmas eve, candles burned on trees; joyous hymns were sung; cookies, candy and cracked nuts were eaten. "And that night the same white-whiskered, red-suited Santa Claus who visits children all around the globe," as the 1950 *Tribune* tells it.

The mischievous Latvian Santa played a few tricks. If little Mara couldn't find her gift, she might be told to "look in the stove," where the bauble was found among the cold ashes.

After a breakfast as early as 4:30 a.m., the family moved on to church, sleigh bells jingling all the way. On Three Kings Day, January 6, trees were taken down and Christmas was over.

But under Russian rule, the show of fun ceased. There could be no outward signs of the holiday, no toys, baking, or get-togethers. So it was under cover of night that many Latvian people smuggled small Christmas trees into their homes. Some were satisfied with evergreen sprigs, carried hidden under coats.

On Christmas Eve, families gathered behind locked doors, hung blankets over windows and lighted candles. In some places, a member of the family had to watch for Russian soldiers outside the door while the family within sang Christmas hymns and worshiped. "In their hearts many of the Russians celebrate this day too," Janis Knostenbergs says. "But they do not have Christmas on their calendars."

Now, after one Christmas here, how do the recent arrivals celebrate? "Just like we did in Latvia before the Russians came."

In 1941, the Nazis chased the Russian armies out of Western Europe and took about 100,000 Latvians to Germany for slave labor (including those who later came here) to rebuild bombed-out areas during the

day and sleep in bomb cellars at night. After WWII, those Latvians found themselves in displaced persons camps under care of the U.S. army.

In American camps, the families were free to hold Christmas celebrations together. They could go to church and have Christmas trees and sing and they did all these things. On Christmas, the children from the camp went caroling among the American military families.

The Americans gave the children gifts and many of the American soldiers were invited to join the Latvians in their celebrations.

On Christmas, 1950, the Pupols family, formerly of Latvia, included two children: Gunta, then three years old, and Janis, two.

Now a metalworker at Stora Enso's Biron mill, Janis, "John," still lives on the family farm near Bethany Lutheran church, an institution he said has been central to the area's Latvian community.

John visited Latvia in 1975, when it was under Communist rule, and last year when he found what was left of his parents' former homes: a barn foundation at his father's and three walls of a house at his mother's.

"Did it really happen?" I asked John Pupols; I don't know that I've seen him since. Did I really leave the Wisconsin Rapids paper mill after the 3-11 shift in the week of July 4th, 1967; did I pick up John at that same home place he lives on now; and did he and I and Mike Ebsen and Gordy Arts drive all night and all the next day to the "world's fair," Expo '67, Montreal, Canada?

Did a cop really let us sleep on the ground in a "cow pasture" that daylight revealed to be a sanitary landfill? Did we really drink Canadian beers and then tour the geodesic dome that was the U.S. exhibit?

Did we sleep in a motel one night, leaving the next day and driving through Detroit

and Chicago only to break down near Madison, pushing my '59 Pontiac down a hill into a garage?

"That amazing three or four days," John said, "I think we made it to Niagara Falls on the way back."

Yeah, I forgot that.

"One of the oddest things," he said, "was at the Canadian border. We had some hot dogs in a container for about three days. They were starting to stink. The lady at the border made us open it. We laughed like crazy."

A Latvian who moves to the U.S. accumulates a different kind of memory than he would on the Russian border.

After a previous *Memoirs* noted several early Korean war casualties, Lyle Zurfluh called to say his brother, Rowland, "Jackie," was an early casualty of the war, a fact not noted by the *Daily Tribune* because Rowland was missing in action until 1952.

"The war had just started," said Lyle. "His outfit went to Korea right away. My mother got only one or two letters from Korea, then nothing."

In March, 1952, the body of Jackie Zurfluh arrived in Port Edwards by train, accompanied by two sergeants from graves registration. A military funeral at Nekoosa followed.

A consultation with Thomas D. Stern, Wood County veterans officer, and contact with several web sites, including the National Archives, confirms that Roland H. Zurfluh, Private in the Army from Wood County, Wis., died July 16, 1950, making him likely the first Korean war era soldier from this area to be listed as killed in action.

12-09-00

Consolidated Landscape

Do you realize carp are eating acorns the squirrels buried?

“I guess everybody knows that,” said the Plover sage, Justin Isherwood, as we watched the sun set across Wisconsin’s second-biggest inland lake.

Some years have passed since the mutation into personal watercraft paradise, so it’s easy to think of Petenwell as ancient. But, when my dad took me down to view the gleaming machinery of the powerhouse, the lake was five years old.

When George Zimmerman hauled in that big northern pike on a Boy Scout camp out, the lake was about ten years old. When, celebrating high school graduation, Mike Ebsen and I leaped from the sandy cliff, Petenwell was about fifteen years old.

As Isherwood and I watched the carp splash by the Hideaway supper club, Petenwell Lake was still younger than we were—even though, like us, it’s elderly enough to turn green every August.

Named for a nearby landmark rock, the reservoir, developed in 1949, is an accomplishment of George W. Mead, long-time president of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. Technically, Petenwell was created and owned by the Wisconsin River Power Co. of which Mead was president.

The purpose: to fully develop the world’s hardest working river as a source of hydroelectric power, “a project to which Mr. Mead gave unlimited energy and resources,” according to Ralph Cole, Consolidated spokesman, in 1950.

To make for better boating and fishing, over a thousand workers cleared vegetation from 5,000 acres in one of the largest operations of its type known to have been undertaken at that time.

The *Daily Tribune* described the scene: “What is now an immense wasteland of ice, snow, tree stumps and brush will, within a few weeks, become a vast lake measuring 15 miles long and four-and-one-half miles wide at its widest point.” The lake would measure about 30 feet deep in the center

On the west or Juneau county side, the water line followed more closely the existing river bank. On the east, it rose to the natural timber-fringed bank of the old “dead” river.

Petenwell was joined the following year by a sibling reservoir to the south. Again, crews cleared most of the bottom land of brush and trees and the first turbo generator at the Castle Rock Lake dam started up in the summer of 1950. Electricity from Petenwell and Castle Rock was transmitted through interconnecting systems of power companies to a large section of the state, including Mauston, Portage, Sheboygan and Fond du Lac.

After the lakes were flooded, there came unintended consequences. In some areas over a mile inland, basements flooded and water stood in fields. A series of ditches along the dikes were built to alleviate the problem.

Because of the far-flung Consolidated outposts, a short wave radio system linked “mobile units” (company trucks and the foreman’s car) and power stations at Wisconsin Rapids, Du Bay, Stevens Point, Petenwell and Castle Rock.

Besides the two lakes, a significant showpiece was planned in the heart of the coated-enamel paper capital of the world: River City, aka Wisconsin Rapids.

For years, the most posh lodging in town was secured at the Hotel Witter, just a couple blocks as the sucker swims from the Consolidated Mill. Consolidated purchased

the Witter from the estate of former proprietor Lester P. Daniels and later deeded the outmoded 19th-century hostelry to the city as part of a long-standing plan to clear the river banks for park land. Awaiting its replacement, the Hotel Witter was operated by a newly-formed corporation, headed by Ralph R. Cole, George W. Mead and Vinson Krapfel.

The paper company previously purchased the Commercial Hotel on the west or mill side of the river, south of Grand Avenue, along with other property, hoping to erect a new facility on the site. The plan was abandoned because of a perceived lack of parking space for the automobiles travelers were now using almost exclusively.

“It is a rather sentimental thing – an old building,” Mead commented about the Hotel Witter, as he might have for the Commercial, which shared the same fate. “For such a building expresses a mode of life, and for this reason we regret in a way having to tear it down.”

Turning its attention back to the east side of the river, the company had “little by little” purchased properties not exactly in the downtown but at the edge of it, extending from Fourth Street east and from East Grand Avenue to Oak Street.

Said Mead. “We now have a very spacious area for a motel type of hotel where travelers could drive in and park their cars on the premises and occupy rooms nearby.”

If a visiting paper buyer wanted to be very old-fashioned and take a walk, it would be about as far from the mill by way of the Grand Avenue bridge as the Hotel Witter had been.

In an eleventh-hour move, Consolidated asked the city for a resolution guaranteeing “fair and reasonable” tax treatment for the new venture. By way of argument, Mead

stressed the low earning capabilities of hotels. To the city council, he explained:

"It is generally recognized here in the city that one of the greatest needs is a hotel. Commercial travelers and all the traveling public who come through here, and they come mostly in automobiles, have not enough good places to stay. The total number of rooms with bath is pitifully small..."

"A good hotel, with about 100 rooms equipped with bathrooms and comfortably furnished, would attract a great many people who avoid this city and go to other places where they are more hospitably received."

Mead contracted with Donn Hougen, local architect, and was anxious to get started hoping to avoid problems that might be caused by the Korean war.

After spirited discussion, Mayor C.C. Knudsen held up the decree by refusing to permit use of his title in the text, insisting that the word, "mayor" be deleted. When Mead agreed to the omission, the council approved the resolution 16-4.

Aldermen William Bonow, Lawrence Behrend, Clarence Teske and William F. Anderson cast the opposing votes.

According to the company's Ralph Cole, "Consolidated takes a certain amount of pride in furnishing this area with additional modern hotel facilities and acknowledges the support given it by city officials, merchants, and the public in the undertaking."

Construction began in September, 1950, with an expectation of completion in summer 1951. The cost of the two-story, 86-room hotel was to be about \$500,000.

At a Rotary club meeting in the Hotel Witter, the planned facility was christened, "Bel-Mead Hotel," which roughly translates, Mead says, as "beautiful valley."

The east portion of the Bel-Mead would

house dining room, kitchen, cocktail lounge and administrative quarters, all to be air-conditioned. The remainder was to be provided with proper outlets in the event it is later desired to extend the air conditioning. Listed in the plans, with an eye to the future, are television outlets. An apartment for the hotel manager was also included.

At the 1950 commencement of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, George W. Mead was awarded an honorary doctorate.

In November of that year, Wisconsin Rapids' most important person stepped down, when Mead, after a half-century of leadership, tendered his resignation as Consolidated president.

The move was necessitated by a September 13, 1950, stroke that left the elder Mead confined to his home on the Island. His son, Stanton W. Mead, a vice president of the firm since 1939, would take his place.

When representatives from wood products mills of 12 countries, including Norway, Sweden and Denmark, arrived, they came as part of the Marshall Plan to rebuild the European paper industry, touring Consolidated and Nekoosa-Edwards mills and touting the local establishments. "Our visit through the paper mills in the Wisconsin Rapids area today has been the most outstanding in our whole tour of the paper industry in the United States," said one competitor-to-be.

U.S. officials hoped that the Europeans might "more efficiently increase their production and help sustain their country's economy rather than rely on ours."

At the same time Consolidated enjoyed the satisfaction of great accomplishment, the company and the industry entered a period of criticism. Paper mill pollution made the Wisconsin River what some called an "open sewer."

In defense, Stanton Mead told a public hearing that "Consolidated is, along with other companies comprising the paper industry, a part of the people of Wisconsin ... So are most of Consolidated's 1,200 stockholders and 90 per cent of its 4,000 employees, together with their families, citizens of the state.

"So, also, are thousands of suppliers who sell to Consolidated and hundreds of merchants who sell to our employees. So, for that matter, are a great many of our customers."

All, he said, were dependent on the right or permission to take water from the Wisconsin river and to return it in "used" form.

Representing Local 94 of the Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers, a local labor leader suggested to a committee that 90 miles of the river from Rhinelander to below Nekoosa be used entirely for an industrial stream. "People employed by the mills are more important than fish," he said.

Gene Seehafer of the Wisconsin Rapids chamber of commerce noted that 55 per cent of city's labor force was employed by Consolidated.

No matter how many you employ; no matter how much you pay them; no matter how broad-minded and how philanthropic your gestures; you and your property are not safe from the barbarians.

While George Mead's son, Walter, resided at his Chicago home, six teen boys broke into his vacant two-story house near the Third Street South pumping station.

With .22s and shotguns, the erstwhile nimrods blasted away at windows and walls, breaking every door and pulling fixtures out of ceilings.

Probably just having fun.

01-13-01

Old Man Winter

A bit awkwardly, the *Daily Tribune* of January 1951 celebrated a season it said would hold its own in the record books with famous winters of the past.

One morning, “the mercury” “dove” to minus 37 at the 16th Street pumping station (the lowest since the minus 43 of 1929). At the Biron dam: minus 45. At the Nepco lake power plant: minus 46.

A lot of inconvenience at these temps: train service disrupted; attendance poor at Lincoln high school; 29 rural schools closed; children at the county Normal Demonstration School sent home until noon, hopefully allowing the building to heat up enough to hold classes.

No wonder, said the *Tribune*, that wintry weather might not seem as severe to the “softies” of that modern era, the mid-century “day of oil burners, steam heat, indoor plumbing and comfortable conveyances.”

“The recollection of a 10-mile trip to town behind a team of slowly plodding, frost-coated horses with the temperature hovering around 20 below was enough to convince anyone that there never again can be weather that cold. But when the mercury sinks to a point where the school buses don’t run and the family gas buggy gives up the ghost before you get it out of the garage, even the old-timers must agree that maybe King winter hasn’t lost any of his tricks for making humanity miserable.”

According to Emil Mueller, superintendent of Wood county parks, the Powers Bluff county park was ready for action with three ski trails and a power tow rope. Begun in 1949, the warm-up and recreation building of hand-cut stone offered hot chocolate and the warmth of two fireplaces.

“The creative efforts as embodied in this new building, born of imagination, long planning and hard work, represent an achievement in county park development that could only be expressed in words of delight by those who visit the Bluff and see for themselves what has been accomplished,” said the *Tribune*.

Much of the park road was resurfaced with “blacktop.” Several thousand coniferous trees were planted with several thousand more to be planted each year. There were plans for a toboggan run.

In a year-end report, superintendent Mueller offered a popular opinion: “During the spring when the trilliums were in bloom, I believe this is the most beautiful place in the county.”

On the last day of the legal fishing season for northern pike, William Benz lands a “monster” at Nepco lake – 25 ½ pounds and 42 ½ inches in length, for which he rates a photo in the *Tribune*.

Nepco Lake in 1951 was 25 years old.

Also in January 1951, a pilot traveling west from Oconto, Wis., provided an interesting moment for motorists five miles east of Rapids.

Clearing their two cars by less than 20 feet, his Piper Cub glided down and came to a stop in the middle of Highway 54 in front of the farm home of Joe Stanke, who helped the pilot push the plane off the road.

The two passengers, on their way from Oconto to the Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minn., continued their journey – by train.

Peckham Road, Nekoosa:

A minor chimney fire caused no damage but vehicles that followed the fire truck caused a traffic jam that blocked Peckham Road from Section Street to the residence involved.

The situation required 20 minutes for Patrolman Raymond Moody to clear the road

because each of the cars in the tangle had to pull into the driveway of the home, back up and turn around.

Fire chief James Mlsna said he was “out of patience with people who follow fire trucks and handicap our efforts. The police department will deal with these people in the future,” he said.

Every year for 29 years, the townspeople of Rudolph looked down their flooded main street and remarked, “We ought to do something about this.”

Melting snows drained into the business district, flooding basements and converting the street to a swollen river of slush and ice. From the Rudolph public school and other buildings, septic tanks emptied into the thoroughfare. Garage owner Frank Tosch called the 1950 version the worst ever. “The flood began on Monday and during the last three days I have counted 30 or 40 cars stuck in the middle of the street.”

The problem had begun in 1921 when the county laid an 18-foot strip of concrete through the village, explained C.A. Ammann, cashier of the Farmers & Merchants bank. The town board was considering setting up a sanitary district with public storm and sanitary sewers.

Spring of 1950 brought the “Cinderella story of a \$101,000 baseball stadium built for \$57,000 by all of the people of a community that really enjoys the national game.” Rapids citizens pooled money, time, labor, materials and talents so fans of the local White Sox could sit in comfort in a new 2,000 seat concrete and steel stadium, according to Leo J. Barrette, project chairman and 1949 citizen of the year.

The history was: a wooden grandstand built in 1906 on the West Side had been moved to Witter field, after which professional baseball was established. But one summer, there were 13 fires in the flam-

mable facility. This was incompatible, officials said, with the “prestige of Class D baseball.”

Among the contributors to the new facility were Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., \$15,000; Wisconsin Bridge & Iron Co., \$15,000; Prentiss Wabers, \$2,500; and the City of Wisconsin Rapids \$12,000. Much of the labor was also donated. On holidays and other days off, William Kruger operated a crane from Wisconsin Valley Concrete Products Co. Volunteer painters from Consolidated’s Rapids division applied \$400 worth of paint from Frank Gill Paint Co.

When cash ran low and paychecks needed to be sent, Consolidated stepped in with another \$7,000.

A 1950 referendum officially established a zoo in Wisconsin Rapids. Residents had actually enjoyed one for two years, located on the grounds of the Gaynor Avenue sewage treatment plant. In the spring of 1948, employees of the sewage plant provided shelter for a fox, owl and several other animals. In 1949, Punky and Spunky, two Java gray monkeys, were purchased with money donated by children – among the estimated 10,000 visitors who came to see Pretty the peacock, Billy the Kid, Ella the deer, Cora the crow, two porcupines and several hamsters.

With a \$6,000 appropriation, the sewage commission planned to relocate the zoo in an adjacent wooded area, according to Lester O’Dell, plant superintendent.

Outside the bars, a surprising number of wild things slithered. The Town of Finley previously offered a 25-cent bounty on rattlesnakes but over 400 were killed one year and the bounty was dropped. In autumn 1950, along the Yellow River, Ohio natives Tunis and Dewey Brandt waged war. The owners of 700 acres along the Yellow River said their father died of a rattlesnake bite

in 1932. “If we don’t have a fire within the next three years the country will be overrun by rattlers,” Tunis said, “Forest fires was what kept them from multiplying before. They’re getting to be a fright.”

Another poor year by the Packers under new coach Gene Ronzani ends with a loss to the 49ers on a snow-swept field in Green Bay. Word was out that one team was likely to be cut from the National Football league’s roster of 13. Will it be the 3-9 Packers?

They aren’t worried, a spokesman said. The only reason for “our folding” would be finances and the Packers don’t have any problems at all. It’s the best financial condition in the club’s 32-year history. “We’ll not only pay all expenses out of this year’s gate receipts, but we’ll have a little left over.”

“We’ve been around this league a lot longer than most of the other clubs and we’ll be in it next year and a good many more, too,” said Packer president Emil Fischer. “And remember how things were about this time last year?” reminds the *Daily Tribune*. “For the second time in their history, the Packers faced a major financial crisis.

“But folks in this smallest town in the league rallied around when a drive for funds started.”

An intra-squad game in a Thanksgiving day snowstorm and a “whirlwind campaign” to sell stock in the non-profit corporation which operated the club came up with \$100,000.

....

Adding a personal insight to the history of Petenwell Lake: Beth Klumb, 920 Two Mile Ave., retired secretary to our Superintendent and Board of Education and daughter of the Necedah postal clerk and postmaster.

That the lake was “developed” in 1949, she writes, was misleading. Consolidated began purchasing property as early as 1938. Local lore told that much of the land

had been purchased for a pittance. Many thought it was to be used for commercial sheep farms.

Klumb’s uncle, Joseph Cunat, drove a truck for the Necedah Creamery, picking up milk and cream from farmers. “As a young girl, I would ride in the truck with my uncle, going from farmer to farmer. And I know we visited farms that now would be under Petenwell Lake,” said Klumb.

Uncle Joe became foreman of a “brushing crew” that cleared the future lake bed of trees, farm equipment and farm homes. There were still silos standing and farm machinery to be removed when the power company, behind schedule, began filling Petenwell Lake.

Lake Van Kuren, a small body of water north of the Strongs Prairie cemetery ... no longer exists. The Petenwell dike, said Klumb, practically sits on what was Strongs Prairie.

“As a child, my Mom would pack a picnic lunch and we would spend the day at Lake Van Kuren. There were small cottages on the lake where people would vacation from Chicago in the summer. Mom and Dad talked about a dance hall that was also at Lake Van Kuren and bands came from all around to play there.”

The great lake Petenwell:

Beneath it, the farms, barns, baubles, homes, ponds, plows, effigies, graves, antiquities, villages and verities of mid-century. And 50-year-old acorns, poised to sprout on the day the waters are released to the sea.

02-10-01

March Madness 1951

Bob Mader. Jack Torresani. Mike Daly.
Jim Reimer. Dean Showers. John Mader.

Harold Brewster.

Boola Gill.

Charley Gurtler.

All-stars in the best years of Lincoln high school basketball.

As the 1950-51 season moved into December, *Tribune* sports editor Ed Hanson praised a favorite guard. "With as magnificent a display of basketball as the Valley conference has ever seen, Boola Gill led the Rapids Red Raiders ... over Tomahawk."

For the sixth time in seven years the Red Raiders swept the holiday tournament with Waukesha and Shorewood, concluding a 9-1 first half of the season. "One cannot look at the conference record, which shows Wisconsin Rapids has averaged almost 75 points per game ... without realizing that the Raiders were a potent aggregation," wrote Hanson.

In late January, Rapids lost a lead and fell in overtime because of "a driving shooting demon when the chips were down in the person of Dick Cable."

Hanson: "Here was a game that will be replayed for many a moon throughout the entire Wisconsin Valley conference. It received the greatest newspaper coverage of any game ever played in the Valley."

Having already lost the first contest 78-38, Supt. Arnold Wicklund of Nekoosa applied for mercy by the second Rapids/Nekoosa match. "We realize we were overmatched ... and have little chance of ever winning a title."

The current Nekoosa team had failed to win in ten Valley starts. Their withdrawal

from the league was accepted.

A prospective Valley replacement for Nekoosa was Eau Claire, defeated in mid-February by "as courageous a recovery as a Lincoln High school team has ever staged. Boola Gill ... was as brilliant a basketball player as one will ever see. It was unbelievable that any high school player can build himself to the tremendous peak of efficiency of which Gill was capable ... Gurtler was just simply dangerous all the way through."

The second Rapids-Point meeting was billed as the state, "game of the year."

"In past years this game has carried a great deal of interest, both locally and throughout the state, but never has the interest been so intense all over Wisconsin." The Panthers (15-2) and Red Raiders (15-2) vied for the Valley title and the top WIAA ranking.

The February 24 *Tribune* front page documented an ecstatic Rapids victory with feature photos by *Tribune* photographer Don Krohn.

Superb team play against Dick Cable's "magnificent one-man effort" earned Rapids the conference title, 76-59, "before a capacity crowd of 4,200 partisan customers who howled their approval from start to finish."

For Rapids, it was the third Valley championship in four years.

Doug "Boola" Gill was one of three unanimous choices for the conference sports writers all-star team, along with Cable and John Kardach of Point. Charley Gurtler garnered all but one vote. The second team included Raider guard Jimmy Ritchay.

The Coaches All-conference team also named Cable, Kardach, Gurtler and Gill with Ritchay on the second team and forwards Don Brewster and Jerry Raasch, honorable mention, thus including the entire starting Red Raiders team.

Completing the 1950-51 roster were Bob Olson, Jack Turner, Jack Crook, Wayne Oestreich, Jim Groszklaus and Rodney Anderson.

At Lincoln fieldhouse, Rapids met Point again in the finals of the regional tournament. The Raiders surged to victory through the "three-way scoring punch" of Ritchay, Gurtler and Gill in "one of those games which had the capacity crowd at Lincoln fieldhouse screaming from beginning to end."

In 1951, big and small schools competed in the same WIAA tournament. They joined at the sectional level, from which winners advanced to the University of Wisconsin fieldhouse, March 15-17.

At Stevens Point, big school Rapids bombed Bonduel, bringing about a repeat of the 1949 sectional finals in which Rapids again outscored Rhinelander to move on to Madison.

Prior to 1951, Rapids' only "state championship" derived from Lawrence College's 1918 tournament at Appleton – a precursor of the WIAA games begun in 1920.

The Madison tournament crown had eluded Rapids, though they made the drive over the treacherous Baraboo hill 16 times and reached second three times.

In 1951, the Red Raiders rode into the finals, carried by Gurtler's 27 points against Menomonie. The finals opponent of first-ranked Rapids: number two Madison West, the 1945 champion.

Before a capacity crowd of 13,800, the victory was achieved with style.

"Here was a team of Red Raiders that caught the fancy of the fans from the first moment they stepped out onto the floor ... a popular crowd favorite although rated from the start one of the favorites for the title ... The zip, the fire, the undaunted will to win displayed by the Raiders will always be re-

membered by those who witness this tournament.”

The high-scoring River City team had a hand in setting seven scoring records. Two players made the Associated Press all-tournament team: Gill and Gurtler.

“After being down here 17 times, it sure feels good to be able to take home the trophy,” said Manders.

“Basketball crazy” Rapids turned out 3,000 on Sunday afternoon for the homecoming. At Smoky Joe’s Corner (Highway 13 South and 73), fire trucks, police cars and automobiles waited to escort the team to the Armory.

Accompanied by cheerleaders and the rousing rhythms of Roger Hornig’s LHS band, game captain Don Brewster carried the big trophy and led his teammates through cheering crowds.

The program included chamber of commerce reps Bruce Beichl and Bernie Ziegler, mayor C. C. Knudsen, superintendent of schools Floyd Smith, LHS principal Aaron Ritchay, sports editor Ed Hanson and coaches J. A. Torresani (who had made all 17 trips to the state classic), Dale Rheel and Phil Manders: “I’m so happy I don’t know what to say.”

The team and its manager Tom Tate were saluted on radio station WFHR Sunday evening and presented at the Heart of Wisconsin Sport Show at Lincoln fieldhouse.

“One of the truly great championship teams,” said Hanson.

Never, he said, have the players been anything but gentlemen. Never have they brought anything but honor.

They hated to lose but lost graciously—only twice all year. They won just as graciously.

Yet arguably not the most glamorous season in history? There was the 1949 team: 24 straight games without a defeat.

But this team had heart, stamina and the poise of a champion. And it was a team with some of the greatest sports fans “in the world,” according to Hanson. “Basketball, football, baseball or anything else, the Rapids fan was a true follower.”

“No city will ever be more proud of its champions. No champions were ever more proud of the city from which they came.”

“It’s not the best team I ever had,” agrees Manders. “But it had more guts”

Accompanied by a former Raider, Mike Daly, then playing for the University of Wisconsin, was Badger coach Bud Foster, visiting Rapids in March, who said, “Your pride in these boys knows no bounds, and especially were you proud that they conducted themselves as champions in all respects at the state tournament. You feel they were representing all of you and when they have a good year you were very proud.”

Why were the teams of the late 1940s and early 1950s so good? Writing then, sports editor Ed Hanson had some ideas.

- Excellence of Lincoln fieldhouse (East Junior High).

- Excellence in coaches: for the frosh, J.A. Torresani; for the B team, Dale Rheel; for the varsity, Phil Manders.

- Excellent players for role models. “What boy in Rapids back some five or six years ago didn’t want to be what Bobby Mader was?”

Team members explained further: “practice” – at Saturday morning grade school leagues; in players’ yards at all seasons; at the “East Side” Lutheran and SS Peter & Paul gym; at the Biron community hall; on the canvas in the fieldhouse before school; after early release from school.

There was nothing but cooperation from LHS principal Ritchay, a former record-setting high school player and proud father of James. It also was helpful that Assumption

high school had not yet been built. Many of the best LHS athletes attended the Catholic grade school, “SS” Peter and Paul.

Finally, Milwaukee City and Fox River conferences had not yet entered the WIAA state tournament.

In a recent interview, Charley Gurtler, a junior on the 1951 team, said that the teams that had gone before were no less distinguished, such as the team of his freshman year, undefeated during the regular season. “You always looked to the older people that were playing and wanted to be like them.”

Mader, Torresani, Daly, Reimer, Showers. For Don Brewster, one of the “legends” was his older brother, Harold, another Red Raider all star.

You and I, little girls and boys then, were reminded that our heroes were just bigger girls and boys – and so they appear in the old photos, wearing black athletic shoes and flat-top haircuts. Once in a while, they got in trouble as girls and boys will.

When the team was feted at a Witter Hotel luncheon, police chief Rudy Exner presented a long package, wrapped with a bow. It seemed that, as a youngster, Gurtler had imperiled a local neighborhood by plinking at unapproved targets. “Exner gave me back my BB gun,” said Gurtler.

See *River City Memoirs Volume II* for more about the state championship of 1951, including interviews with players and coach Phil Manders.

03-10-01

Krohnographs

Who can be calling at this hour of the night?
It's a doctor.

It's a police officer.

A coroner.

It's a bad accident out by Smoky Joe's corner.

It's a major fire in town: Schnabel's, Rapids Furniture, Gill paint factory, Rapids Beverage.

A murder in Grand Rapids.

If something happens at night, it's probably bad. If it happens in the day, it's probably good.

It's a parade on Grand Avenue.

It's a dedication at a church.

A celebration at the fieldhouse.

All part of the game in the days of hot lead and linotype. Back in the days of hard work and not a lot of glory to it.

When his labor is made public, the credit is an anonymous "staff photo." But, once in a while, initiative and talent are recognized.

Like May 10, 1951, when *Tribune* Staff Photographer Don Krohn receives a "Fire Foto of the Year" award for "Moving In," a dramatic shot of three firefighters silhouetted against a wall of flame.

At his Port Edwards house in the winter of 2001, Krohn talked about his part in documenting the history of "River City."

During his senior year at Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln high school, 1946-47,

Krohn worked in the *Tribune* mail room after school and during summer vacation. His introduction to professional photography came in the darkroom, "souping" film and printing photographs.

The last step, in the era of letterpress printing, was engraving a photographic image with nitric acid on a zinc plate—"kind of a smelly operation," said Krohn.

After on-the-job training as a part-time weekend photographer, Krohn was asked by owner and publisher Bill Huffman, Sr., if he wanted to come in as full time *Tribune* Staff Photographer. "He offered me the job at a little less than \$25 a week."

Photographic experience in high school and instruction from departing photographer Joe Landowski was all Krohn needed to begin.

He didn't have a lot of contact with the elder Huffman, whose offices were above Montgomery Ward at his Wisconsin Network and WFHR radio station. The newspaper occupied a small building south of Ward's, facing the river.

"The photo department was in sort of a lean-to added to the back end of the building. It used to get fairly cold back there when you'd get a really hard cold snap and the chemicals would almost freeze. We'd have to warm them up to 68 degrees. Eventually, they did add a large heater and piped in steam from the furnace," Krohn said.

Early *Tribune* photographs were printed from 4 by 5-inch negatives shot on the standard "press camera,"

the Speed Graphic. "In the early days, we took photographs with large flashbulbs," Krohn said. "Eventually, we got the first strobe unit. It had a very large wet battery, almost the size of an auto battery. You'd carry that around your shoulder. It was very good for taking sports photos, but it was quite a package to carry around."

You could do a lot of things with a press camera you couldn't with the smaller cameras. If you got tired, you could always sit and rest on the Speed Graphic.

Reporters filled in with photos to illustrate their stories, notably Jane Jackson, who became society editor. Bill Huffman, Jr., the publisher's son, contributed an occasional shot. Also helping out was freelancer Lawrence Oliver of Vesper.

The chief editor at the *Tribune* in 1951 was Carl Otto. General photo assignments, such as the ubiquitous "grip and grin," came through the managing editor, for some years Bill Beckmann.

The "spot news" photo calls were those that sometimes came at home, and then, it seemed, usually in the middle of the night.

Among the reporters was a good one, said Krohn, by the name of Marty Segrist, "who coached me with my early writing."

Also at the *Tribune*, writer and editor Oliver Williams. Longtime *Tribune* stalwart Lorena Paap had been society editor and continued in that department.

Krohn received some of his assignments from sports editors, whose duties included providing play by play commentary for radio station WFHR. Sports editor Don Unferth left for a position with the Chicago White Sox and was replaced by Ed Hanson who reported the 1951 state basketball championship.

Rounding out the staff photographer's duties were assignments from the advertising department.

The photographer was in close touch with the Wood County sheriff's department and the Wisconsin Rapids police department. "They would call us when there was spot news," Krohn said. "The sheriff's department always wanted copies of our photographs. They did not have their own cameras when I started working at the newspaper."

With no competition from television, Krohn said, "I was usually the only one at the scene."

He was not lonely that weekend in 1951, when Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln won the state basketball tournament. At the Madison sessions, the photographers took their places on the edge of the floor, next to the out-of-bounds marker. "You'd always have the big guys there, the Madison newspapers, the Milwaukee papers," said Krohn. "Sitting right under the home team basket."

"We didn't have telephoto lenses. We had the standard lens. The photographers would be in groups right under the basket shooting flash right into the players' eyes."

After the game, Krohn traveled back to Wisconsin Rapids in a heavy snowstorm. The next day, he was out taking photographs at the homes of the players.

Krohn said former CPI public affairs director Dan Meyer recently reminisced about one of Meyer's first days on the job. Up to that time, press access to Consolidated's unique paper coating systems had been tightly controlled. It was an event of significance when he escorted Krohn inside a local mill to photograph a new piece of equipment.

"Well, we finally made it inside of the Bastille!" Krohn told Meyer.

In a 1990 *Tribune* feature, reporter Jamie Marks observed that Krohn was a charter member of the Wisconsin Press Photographers Association and had been ahead of his time in beginning a standard of at least one local photo per day on the front page. "It was the old school," Krohn told Marks. "There were some real characters..."

Emphasis was on the "real," Marks wrote, as Krohn remembered the occasional newsroom sojourn to the nearby Uptown Bar at the end of a busy day.

What happens to old *Tribune* photographers?

Do they, like old soldiers, fade away?

For starters, they are not old. And they are well-soaked with photo fixer chemicals, so they do not fade, although they often switch from one side of the camera to the other.

In 1953, Krohn, son of a Consolidated worker, moved to Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company as assistant editor/photographer of the company's magazine, NEPCO NEWS. He became public relations manager in 1971.

In the early 1980s, Krohn was a friend of the Wakely house, owned by his employer, the successor of Nekoosa-Edwards. It was Krohn who loaned me a key so I could spend a night communing with the ghosts of historic Point Basse.

Krohn retired in 1990 but continues to be active in forestry issues and community organizations, especially the Alexander House, Port Edwards. But for some, his status will be defined by a time long ago, when he was still living with his parents on 13th Avenue; when he attended every public function and knew everyone in town.

When he could be readily identified by his prominent position and the tools of his trade.

When they knew him as Don Krohn, *Tribune* photographer.

04-14-01

1951 Spring

Hey, buster! Better slow down. The warning comes from none other than Chief of Police R.J. Exner—to pedestrians braving the busy intersection of Third and West Grand avenues, the core of the West Side, anchored by the Mead-Witter block, Johnson Hills, the First National Bank and Church's drug store. Indeed, he said, motorists had told Exner that persons dash heedlessly into the street without so much as waiting for the "walk" sign.

"We had a no-fatality year in Wisconsin Rapids during 1950," Exner said. "And we would like to carry this good record through this year too."

Something you couldn't prepare for:

Traveling by patrol car down Second Avenue South to cover an accident in Port Edwards: David Sharkey, 36, a Wood county traffic officer, Deputy Sheriff Lloyd Knuteson, 48, and Harry Precious, 43, county welfare director.

It's a Saturday evening and a Nekoosa guy driving toward Rapids with his date in the passenger seat passed several automobiles on a curve by Lyon park and rams head-on into the patrol car. The woman, an English teacher at Alexander high school, Nekoosa, was severely injured.

Most likely, you have heard of A.J. Crowns, 39 years an attorney and, in 1951, Wood County divorce counsel.

He had taken his daughter and two sons into his law firm.

The younger Crowns were: Wood county's first known woman lawyer, Betty Ann, 24, a recent law school graduate; Byron, 27, about to be admitted to the bar. He had lived three-and-a-half years as a meteorologist in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic region; Arthur Jr., 29, who had served three years during World War II with the 15th air force in Italy.

The action was beginning to heat up south of the border in the sandy plains of the township that retains the river city's former name. No surprise that a record number of votes was recorded in the town of Grand Rapids.

Elected: Ben Hanneman, chairman; Gerhardt Oberbeck, clerk; Lloyd Margeson, justice of the peace; and Raymond B. Kedrowski, constable.

That conservationist guy down by Plainfield?

He told the Heart of Wisconsin Conservation league that prairie chickens and sharptail grouse were disappearing from many states in the middle west, including Wisconsin. "We have to find out where we can economically have chickens and sharptails," said Hamerstrom.

The secretary of the Wood County Farm Supply Cooperative, Vesper, told a local Rotary club about the start of "farm cooperation" in Wood county.

It began in 1907, said Max Leopold, when a group of farmers sent John Rolsma of Arpin to Nebraska to obtain 14 carloads of hay. Leopold denied that co-ops encouraged members to avoid

paying taxes. "We tell every man to pay his share of taxes on the dividends he receives," he said.

"All of the money we have saved through our co-ops has made our lives better and has built up our rural communities. We don't believe in foreign 'isms' and the fact that we belong to cooperatives proves this."

Considered among the top "music men" in the U.S., the conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony orchestra arrived at the University of Wisconsin campus for a music clinic. He was a former resident of Wisconsin Rapids and acquainted with many residents here.

Edward P. Kurtz, a Two Rivers native and assistant manager of the Hotel Northland in Green Bay was appointed manager of the new Hotel Mead, under construction since the previous September. Kurtz, a veteran of World War II, 33, was married and had one son, later known as "Jack," also a manager at the Mead.

Arthur Reinholt, 26, of Pittsville, was appointed new Wood county traffic officer. He was a veteran of the army engineer corps in the Asiatic theater of World War II.

John Potter, district attorney, a reservist veteran of World War II, was ordered to report for active duty with the U.S. marine corps because of the Korean conflict.

Cpl. Edgar W. Heiser, 19, was awarded the Bronze Star medal for meritorious achievement on the Korean front.

Recuperating in Miami, Fla., from a stroke, George W. Mead, the builder of the Consolidated paper company received numerous 80th birthday greetings from Wisconsin Rapids. He said he enjoyed a birthday cake that had been sent down by a Consolidated employee. Joining him had been his son, Stanton, daughter, Emily Baldwin, and Emily's son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Hartley Barker.

Mead said he was able to walk with an attendant, a new idea for treating paralysis. "As for me, I am going to get the most out of life in the years I may still have, with the strength of body and determination that I may apply to the task."

A special program in honor of Mead was presented over the Wisconsin Rapids division mill broadcasting system.

Obits:

•Walter F. Herschleb, proprietor of the Herschleb Ice Cream company, 69, was a former member of the city council. He had entered the ice cream business in 1939, first at 240 East Grand Ave., then 230 East Grand Ave.

Herschleb built the ice cream plant at 640 16th St. N. in 1945.

•Guy O. Babcock, retired president of the Wood County National bank died at his Third Street residence. Among other "interests," Babcock was a director of the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper company, Prentiss Wabers Products Co., Dairyman's State bank of Arpin and the Farmers & Merchants bank of Rudolph.

He was part owner of the Vesper State bank and in 1913 organized the Nekoosa State bank.

•John Stark, 84, Third Street S., had arrived in 1911 to operate the Ideal theater just east of the Wood County National bank. In 1914, he built what would become the Rapids theater, later Rogers Cinema.

•H.H. Voss, born in 1865, had lived 64 years in the Tri-Cities area.

Voss had come to Rapids as manager of the old John Daly Drug store, later opening his own drug store, the H.H. Voss and Wood County Drug company in the Wood block at the east end of the bridge. He had owned a hardware, furniture and funeral service store in Nekoosa, which he sold to Vernon W. Feldner.

As a boy, Voss had lived near the Ringling brothers in Sauk county. At the first performance of the circus in Baraboo, Voss recalled, "the show included trained dog and horse acts and an exhibition of snakes captured in the Baraboo hills which were charmed reluctantly by Al Ringling's wife." Voss said the brothers set up a small tent to house the spectators. Seats were rough planks laid across borrowed folding chairs.

The first circus parade was devised to create interest in the show. Rented feed wagons, trimmed with crepe paper, paraded through town behind a local band.

Married in 1893 to Mame Perry of Tomah, Voss also helped raise his wife's sister's daughter, Marion, later Mrs. M.R. Fey.

•Daniel J. Arpin, 88, member of the prominent lumbering family had been born in the small backwoods community of Grand Rapids in 1862. The previous Christmas, he had been featured in the *Daily Tribune*.

•Miss Nettalie Boucher. At the time of her death at 82, she had come to town as first principal of Howe grade school, where she taught for six years. Returning to be first principal at then new Lowell school, she retired in 1926 after two years.

•Grace Balderston Daly, 81, first librarian of T.B. Scott public library had coined the slogan, "Grand Rapids, the Heart of Wisconsin." Her husband, the late John E. Daly, had founded Daly Drug & Jewelry and operated the Daly Opera House until it burned in 1922.

The county was named for Mrs. Daly's maternal grandfather, Joseph Wood, who settled here in 1846.

•Pfc. Donald R. Young, 22, killed in action. A reservist, he had been with the infantry in Korea since November.

•Lt. Howard J. Landry, believed killed in action over Korea after his F-80 plane collided head-on with an enemy MIG jet, he had flown 111 missions and was looking forward to a furlough home.

As previously reported here, Landry's words had been quoted around the world in an Associated Press story by Hal Boyle: "They really clobbered that hill!"

05-12-01

Reuben

Can it be the Lord Jesus himself, come to the Eight Corners grocery?

Sunlight radiates from behind the head of long hair that almost fills the doorway.

“Who is it?”

Her mother, the owner, wants to know but the little girl is so frightened she can’t speak.

It’s 1935.

Can it be a shock of hay?

Not when it moves and stands up and becomes a tall, skinny guy, with long hair, like Christ on the cross.

“What do you want?”

He shows the boys a tin-can model train that the wind makes go by itself.

It’s 1945.

A religious fanatic?

The venerable Grand Avenue drifter preaches a line of social commentary a mile long—for my benefit.

He’s got the famous bicycle with a third wheel for riding the railroad tracks. Snake-like hair drapes over his face and down his back but he’s too old to be Jesus.

It’s 1966.

Reuben?

The long-haired ancient in overalls wraps fingerless gloves around a cup of coffee at the counter of a drug store soda fountain on State Street, Madison.

“Are you from Rapids?” asks the college girl.

It’s the 1970s and yes, he is and it’s him, “Old Reuben,” no doubt society’s most sociable sociophobe, the so-called “hermit” of River City.

Reuben Lindstrom, born Nov. 7, 1896, in the town of Sigel to a Finnish-born mother, Anna, who never learns to speak English

and a hard-working, presumably Swedish, father, Carl Lindstrom, who simply starts bunking with a logging crew until the boss notices him and puts him on the payroll.

Reuben attended Spring Lake school in the town of Sigel and specialized in playing hooky. In 1916, he and a neighbor saved their wood-cutting money to attend an Omaha automobile college. Reuben stayed a couple weeks.

When older brother Carl died in World War I, Reuben departed for Alaska and British Columbia, where, he said, he worked as a longshoreman, sawmill hand and trapper.

“There was a lot of dying up there,” Reuben says. “It didn’t mean much to anybody.”

When dogs killed and partially devoured a baby, Reuben marveled when the father said he doesn’t care; he had plenty of kids. “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 U.S. about 1929. On a canoe trip down the Mississippi, a bout with malaria put him in the hospital. That’s when he concluded that long hair was an antidote for heart attacks.

In 1930, Reuben stayed with his sister, Lida Lampman, in Nekoosa. Neighbors figured he was an Indian. On top of hair braided and tied with red ribbons, he wore a western-style, narrow-brimmed “Cady” hat. He liked to sit on a wood-chopping block, smoking, talking about elk and the Northern Lights.

“Hoover was President, and everybody was bumming,” Reuben reminisced to a reporter regarding the early 1930s. “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. 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.”

Obit., 1938: Reuben’s father, Carl Lindstrom.

In 1940, according to Reuben, he was issued a patent for a power-producing windmill which proved to be correct. He also tried to patent wind toys but believed his Minneapolis attorneys only took his money. A 1941 Milwaukee Journal said, of his inventions, “Lindstrom claims this type of wind powered wheel motivation comes the closest to achieving perpetual motion.” According to the Journal, Reuben feared the day a cop would tell him to get a license, “for his weird contraption of bicycle wheel, one cylinder gas motor, pulley, levers, scooter and miscellany.” Said the Journal, “Lindstrom putt-putts down the highway at a claimed 30 miles an hour, certain that if anything goes wrong it can be fixed with a pin, a screwdriver and a pair of pliers.”

On July 30, 1945, a patient in a dentist chair looked out on West Grand Avenue and saw Reuben steer his motorized bicycle in front of a car making a right turn onto the Grand Avenue bridge. The next day, the *Tribune* reported that the “former Alaskan gold prospector” who lived on a farm with his mother north of Wisconsin Rapids, had been seriously injured.

The same year, Reuben found himself “a guest” at the Wausau police station after riding a freight train from Rapids, once again receiving media attention. “Lindstrom, who wears his hair almost down to his waist, giving him the appearance of a fugitive from a wild west show...said when he was hospitalized the attendants cut his hair against his

wishes.”

Explaining his presence in Wausau: “I got lonesome, so I decided to take a trip. Guess I’ll go out west and see a sister I haven’t seen for 30 years.

“Fashion is the main religion of this world,” he opined. “If you are different, they think you are nuts. Most people stay away from me because they think I’m a religious fanatic. The girls also stay away from me.”

He said that in the summer he washes his hair every day. “I soak it in the river.”

In 1949, a national news service circulated “Samson Shorn,” a photo of Reuben with his “Medusa” hair, taken in Buffalo, New York, shortly after he is removed from a freight train by railway police. He returned to Wisconsin Rapids with his hair trimmed and his face clean-shaven.

Obit., 1949. Reuben’s mother, Anna Lindstrom, 2011 Saratoga St., 90 years of age.

Four children survive: Mrs. Agda Garrels, Baraboo; Mrs. Carl Benson, Crows Landing, Cal., Miss Agnes Lindstrom, at home, and Reuben Lindstrom, Sigel. Two children have died previously.

In the late 1950s, as he surpassed the age of 60, Reuben settled down to \$83 monthly from county social services. Routinely, he rode his sometimes-motorized three-wheeled bicycle on the railroad tracks from Sigel to Rapids. A Paul Gross film shows him passing the Bender law office on the East Side.

Sometimes Reuben stopped at the Chatterbox restaurant on West Grand Avenue for a cup of coffee and a nickel cigar, which he often saved for later.

Ed Vruwink rented a house to Reuben northwest of Wisconsin Rapids. “He’d be out cooking, sitting on an old stool, the fire going, cats gathered around.” Invariably, Reuben scratched his head and looked up at

the sky, remarking, ‘I don’t think it’s gonna rain today.’” When Reuben departed for other opportunities, he left behind empty cat food cans by the hundreds.

George Smullen’s 1968 *Daily Tribune* article profiled a 72-year-old eccentric, who said, “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 [long, uncombed hair], not even the carnivals. Look at the hippies. They’ve got long hair and they can’t get jobs either.” Reuben said he would remain a hobo at heart and hoped society would permit him to live out his life as he pleased. He wished to die in the open, not in a hospital or convalescent home.

Some Rapids residents knew Reuben lived a parallel life through the years, in Baraboo, Wis., visiting his sister, Agda Garrels, and riding his bicycle around that town. “My mother had a little influence on him,” says Agda’s son, Reuben Garrels, Baraboo, who took “Uncle” to a barber. “He looked 25 years younger. The only time I knew of that he cut his hair.”

Around 1969, “Uncle” left Rapids permanently to live with Reuben Garrels, near Circus World museum. After five or six years, Lindstrom moved on to Madison.

“Last time I saw him,” said Garrels, “he was out here with a young couple to visit. He became a hero of the hippies. He liked sociability; but when it came to his personal life, leave him alone.” In Madison, Reuben lived in housing provided by social services. He spent a lot of time hanging around the square.

Reuben carried a picture of a woman with a large snake wrapped around her neck but his memory was fading and the relationship

with the woman was not disclosed.

Reuben, in his mid-80s, was taken several times to Madison’s Methodist Hospital. In 1984, a Madison social worker contacted a former employer, the Good Samaritan nursing home in Lodi, Wis., and found a place for Reuben.

At Good Samaritan, he was bathed. His hair, which seemed to be alive, was washed with alcohol. His room, shared with three other men, overlooked a corn field. He spent a lot of time lying on the bed, looking out the window.

Attendants noted that Reuben seemed to have a twinkle in his eye. He was viewed as a gentle, free spirit, a street person. He talked about riding his bike along railroad tracks to Devil’s Lake but was not remembered as mentioning his relationship with Wisconsin Rapids.

Other than bib overalls, moccasins, and other clothing, Reuben had one possession, according to Good Samaritan social worker Jackie Czehno: a picture postcard of a “snake woman” act. His one visitor during his four-year stay was the woman from the postcard.

Five times, while at the nursing home, he was hospitalized. A month after breaking his hip, Reuben tried to get out of bed unassisted and was found dead on the floor. It was Jan. 2, 1988.

Reuben’s nephew, his existence not known to the staff, was not informed and Reuben was buried in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, Lodi, with no friends or family in attendance.

The staff at Good Samaritan had followed instructions not to cut Reuben’s hair. When he died, it was the same glorious mop it had been when he first darkened the door.

06-08-01

NEPCO

Lebel-sur-Quevillon.
Espanola.
Blendecques.
Mississauga.
Scarborough.
Ashdown.
Nekoosa.
Port Edwards.

A few of the little cogs that will circle the big wheel—Canada’s largest producer of specialty and fine papers and soon-to-be third-largest maker of uncoated “free-sheet” paper in the world—

DOMTAR.

But, for us in River City, long before DOMTAR, Georgia-Pacific or Great Northern, there was our own Big Kahuna, our own two-mill, two-town paper combine—

NEPCO

Under that name, the firm was already one merger along. In 1908, Nekoosa Paper Co. of Nekoosa had joined John Edwards Manufacturing Co. of Port Edwards to form Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company.

At my Two Mile Avenue boyhood residence, in what was then the town of Grand Rapids, there were certain days when a breeze wafted in from the southwest, when you sniffed, winced and whispered the bad word, “Nekoosa.”

The N-word translates as “noxious fumes.” It smelled about the same as “Mosinee.” The chemical-pulp odor guaranteed that Nekoosa would remain a work-in-man’s mill town, not a Lake Camelot.

Occasionally, my family and I braved the N-smell. I remember enjoying a feature movie at the Rialto Theatre, downtown Nekoosa. It was a real downtown then, an old-fashioned lineup of businesses on both sides of Market Street. Some residents did

all their shopping there and almost never had to drive to Rapids, except for the Cranboree.

If Nekoosa was meant to be the home of labor, “Port” was the spa for management. Vice presidents enjoyed a short walk along the scenic Wisconsin to the home offices of a major paper company, *their* paper company.

Port Edwards no longer hosts that fine office with art and history exhibits. Nor a statue of the paper company’s owner in the paper company park.

The first owner to live here was John Edwards Jr. Next came his son-in-law, L.M. Alexander and then L.M.’s son, John E. Alexander.

No longer do the Edwards keep a mansion across the street from the mill. Nor do the executives stroll to and from handsome homes. No longer do we ponder whether Port is the wealthiest village in the world, “per capita.” No longer is it called White City with so many company houses gleaming with the pigment said to be provided wholesale by president L.M. Alexander. No longer is it a Methodist-dry village, as the elder Alexander preferred.

To check that, I called the village convenience store today.

“Do you sell beer?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you the only place in Port Edwards that does?”

“I’m pretty sure we are.”

The Depression and World War II generally stymied growth but, local industries caught up as then NEPCO president John E. Alexander introduced a \$4 million building project: “The year 1950 marked the end of a decade which saw Nekoosa-Edwards Paper company make more progress than in any single decade since its founding over 60

years ago, and also marks the beginning of still greater progress and expansion.”

The most important additions were a large warehouse at Port Edwards and a new paper machine at Nekoosa. Alexander listed other improvements: new laboratories, machines, trimmers, filtration plants, pulpwood chippers and pulp beaters.

In the interest of water pollution abatement, NEPCO experimented with burning spent sulfite liquor or spreading it on the area’s sandy roads. In the interest of forest management and reforestation, 300,000 free seedlings went to farmers and landowners “all within easy trucking distance of the mills for economy and convenience when the trees reach harvesting size and are ready to be converted into pulpwood.”

Advertising and merchandising of Nekoosa “Pre-Tested” business papers and specialty wrapping papers “carried the message to a continually expanding market.” The most popular products were watermarked “Nekoosa” and “John Edwards.”

Alexander also noted progress in wages, salaries and social benefits with a complementary advance in new schools, churches, homes and stores in the two communities where the mills were located.

Strikes, material shortages and bad weather caused delays but in February 1951, the first classes were held in the “ultra modern” Nekoosa school, designed by, who else? Donn Hougen.

Also in Nekoosa, a recreation area to be called Riverside Park had been provided by NEPCO. Not far away, a swimming pool, built with the company’s financial assistance.

As in Nekoosa, NEPCO directly and indirectly assisted development of the village of Port Edwards with new homes, improvements in streets and highways, extensions

to water and sewer mains, a water softening and filtration plant and more extensive lighting. NEPCO donated the Edwards-Alexander Memorial Park, with tennis courts and swimming pool, on land that had been the L.M. Alexander estate.

On the site of the former village hall, a modern, eight-family NEPCO apartment building was erected. The old hall was moved to 8th Street South, Wisconsin Rapids, said Port historian J. Marshall Buehler, where it became Johnny's Rapids Inn.

The post office, formerly in the NEPCO main office building, was moved to a central location, with larger quarters to handle the ever-expanding daily mail. Also in the village: two filling stations, a lumber yard and a combination restaurant and bowling alley—the Paper Inn.

All village churches had new buildings: St. Alexander Catholic; Community Methodist Church; and Trinity Lutheran.

John Edwards grade and high school had been a source of community pride since 1933.

Its colonial features were kept in tip-top shape and its modern decoration “recognized as one of the finest of its size in any comparable community in this section of the country providing an equally up-to-date educational system.”

“Where’s the town?”

That was the mystery of Port Edwards.

It could be solved by traveling a couple blocks off the river, where, tucked away in the peaceful, verdant village, was a modern phenomenon.

Port historian Marshall Buehler told me, in a South Wood County Historical Corp.-sponsored interview, how his family became involved.

Buehler’s father, August, owned a grocery, the White City Store, but always

dreamed of a supermarket, which he did not have the finances to build. “John Alexander came along and had a meeting with all the business people in Port Edwards, and said that Nekoosa-Edwards paper company was going to build a shopping center; would they move in as tenants? Dad grabbed the opportunity.”

Inspired by “a little model shopping center” in the Milwaukee area, Alexander took the Port business people down to Milwaukee on an overnight adventure. “Wined ’em, dined ’em, put ’em up in a motel,” said Buehler.

The White City Store became Buehler’s “Superette” and the old downtown became the two-block long Shopping Center, dedicated in March 1949, “Latest step in the development of the village of Port Edwards as one of the nation’s model communities,” according to a special *Tribune* feature.

Conceived of by Alexander for a program of civic improvement and planned during the war years, it was to be operated on a non-profit, self-sustaining basis. Like the school, the mall-like stone building was considered one of the finest structures of its kind “in any community of comparable size.” It housed Nekoosa-Port Edwards State Bank, George Sisco barber shop, Port Edwards Beauty Shop, Sandman drug store, Fuhs restaurant coffee shop, an appliance store and a hardware store.

Municipal space included a village board meeting room, a “lockup” office, safe and public restrooms. A Medical Arts unit had facilities for both a doctor and dentist office.

There were two supermarkets: Buehler’s, the “oldest merchandising establishment” in Port Edwards, and Klement’s Red Owl Agency.

Throughout the summers of the Fifties, NEPCO and I crossed paths almost daily. Or, more accurately, I crossed their paths.

As a juvenile Davy Crockett, I only had to trek half a block to set foot on NEPCO property. The company owned thousands of acres surrounding Tri-City airport, then a glass-strewn hangar apron and abandoned POW camp. Nearby was the opening in the woods we called Swamp Valley—the winding, one Mile Creek near its junction with the Two Mile. Some of the forest land was posted against trespassing or against the discharge of firearms so we felt like we were skulking and plinking like Robin in Nottingham.

Though the young nimrods imagined being nabbed by Alexander’s NEPCO thugs, the absentee landowners and their lieutenants were almost never seen.

The jewel in the crown of NEPCO, from my point of view, was their lake, about two miles south of my house, readily reachable by bicycle. On the north shore—the private NEPCO park that my friends and I so often found our way into.

Just south of the airport and Swamp Valley stood a cathedral of pines. When NEPCO abruptly left it a ragged hillside of raw stumps, I felt the first surges of resentment against self-centered, all-powerful private enterprise. But in balance, NEPCO’s ownership was a happy circumstance. Because of its land ownership, I was able to enjoy acre upon acre of forest, streams and lakes, saved from development even into the new millennium.

07-14-01

Necedah Visions

From all corners of the nation and from Canada and Cuba: the 100,000. By way of seven special trains, 125 chartered buses and 15,000 automobiles: 100,000 pilgrims to Necedah, the small Juneau County community. If early for the Aug. 15, 1950, assignation, they slept in cars and tents along the highway, on porches and lawns and wherever people would take them in: these 100,000.

With county and state police keeping order on two roads leading to the 120-acre farm, "where 57-year-old Fred Van Hoof, tries to edge out a living from the barren, sandy soil," they found their way, the pilgrims.

As relays of Catholic laymen at a public address microphone recited rosaries through the morning, the crowd sweated into the merciless sun and billowing sand. Some of the 100,000 fainted, to be revived by bystanders with the help of state police, a first-aid technician and Red Cross nurses.

On nearby property, a dozen stands offered for sale soft drinks, sandwiches and religious goods at "moderate prices," to the pilgrims.

In front of the two-story farmhouse, a white statue of Our Lady of Fatima, gift of a Milwaukee religious organization, banked with flowers brought by neighbors, for the 100,000. Surrounding the shrine, long rows of kneeling benches erected by a voluntary citizens committee. To the rear, small ash trees where the farm woman saw her first apparition, to which they directed their gaze, the pilgrims.

Despite admonitions from Catholic Bishop John Treacy to stay away: 60 priests and 30 nuns among the 100,000.

At the stroke of noon, the apparitions, appearing to the farm wife out of a blue mist at the ash trees: The Virgin Mary, dressed in white. "Pray and pray hard. The time is short."

Her words to the pilgrims.

Perform religious rituals faithfully; be vigilant against the enemies of God; battle Russia and the Iron Curtain with prayer, sacrifice, penance and sacraments. The words of the Mother of God, relayed through Mary Ann Van Hoof to the 100,000.

Fifty-one years ago, Don Krohn was among the multitude awaiting a miracle. "It was quite a surprise when she fainted. I was with the other new people standing right in front of her. All I recall is seeing thousands and thousands of people. All tramping across the fields and into the area, coming to the old farmhouse that was her home."

Krohn was the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune* photographer.

"Somebody was leading prayers, the rosary, with all those people pulsating with enthusiasm. Then Mary Ann Van Hoof came out. There was an electric feeling like a chant and then she fainted." It happened just as Krohn used his last piece of film.

Fortunately, he was a member of the Wisconsin news photographers organization, and acquainted with many of his colleagues. "The Milwaukee Sentinel

photographer next to me handed me a couple of film holders."

In turn, Krohn said, the Associated Press and out-of-town newspapers used the darkroom at the *Tribune* because it was the closest daily newspaper to Necedah. All part of documenting one of the biggest mass events to ever take place in central Wisconsin.

With Krohn was William F. Huffman Jr. The son of the *Tribune* publisher was learning the newspaper game as a reporter, although he wouldn't get credit for it. In 1950, news stories appeared without a byline.

The apparitions of that year had begun in April when Mrs. Van Hoof noticed that the figure on a crucifix emitted a strange glow and a voice she said was that of Mary, the "Mediatrice" between God and the people of earth.

In May, "Our Holy Mother" appeared in a flash of light behind four ash trees with messages for Van Hoof to relay. "Tell the children of God to pray the Rosary, to live clean lives and to make sacrifices for sinners." The "Blessed Virgin" also called for prayers encouraging the conversion of Russia to Christianity.

At the climactic event of August 1950, many onlookers viewed nothing out of the ordinary, but Van Hoof's husband, Fred, 57, declared, "She saw it."

The Rev. Sigismund Lengowski, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi parish, Necedah, also verified that Mrs. Van Hoof, a 40-year-old mother of seven, had been favored with a visitation. Among other instructions, she was told to build

a shrine on the spot of the apparition and erect a large crucifix on the village bluff.

“The year of 1951 will be a sad year unless you pray, pray and pray hard,” related the Mediatrix though Mrs. Van Hoof’s voice. With the Korean conflict as background, the message came: “Save those sons dying out there on the battlefields now for lack of your faith.” The Mediatrix also advised the faithful to take care of the children, clean up corruption and stop worshiping the almighty dollar. “Pray the Rosary! That’s the only weapon. The enemy is powerful and is ready to pounce upon you. The clouds are gathering close to the Americas right now.”

Words of a Wisconsin Rapids woman are included in a book of testimonials by pilgrims. The woman had attended Mass at St. Vincent De Paul church in Rapids, prior to driving to Necedah in a steady rain. As she prayed before the scheduled visions, her husband said, “This reminds me of a spiritualist meeting.”

It was about noon when Van Hoof came out of the house and a woman screamed, “By God, it’s really true,” and fell to her knees. Then it happened that the Rapids woman and so many in the crowd saw the sun, covered with a dark, greenish gray disk, spinning down toward the earth. And she testified, “I thought the end of the earth was coming and fell to my knees.”

A Pittsville woman also described the sun spinning closer to the earth. “I and many other people, fell to our knees in awe.”

The *Daily Tribune* visited the Oct. 7, 1950, event—a 25-minute “last” message from the Mediatrix to the “throng” of 50,000.

Responding to this seventh vision, gasps were heard from women who again saw the sun behaving oddly. A Catholic priest told reporters he saw the sun whirl clockwise and jump.

After Mrs. Van Hoof collapsed and was helped into her house, word was sent out that the Virgin had appeared in a flowing blue gown. Her message warned of death and destruction unless people prayed hard for peace and the conversion of Communists to Christianity. “As citizens, do something! Save your country. Not by good times, by trying to outwit their neighbor as to who can get the best car, but who can say the most rosaries. Remember the way of the cross.”

Some of those who visited with Van Hoof didn’t see anything miraculous. The Catholic hierarchy in La Crosse was critical of goings-on at the Yellow River micropolis. After all, Van Hoof’s mother was believed to be a “spiritualist” and weren’t these visions just another way of “channeling?” Some claimed the stigmata that accompanied visions were self-inflicted. Perhaps the community was all too eager to embrace the action. “Bushel baskets” of cash carried to the local bank by dark of night alleviated an economic slump that had followed the end of work on the nearby Petenwell and Castle Rock dams.

Many years later, contemporary authors continue to examine the Van Hoof

visions as two recent books attest: “Encountering Mary” (1991) by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz and “Something to Declare” (1998) by Julia Alvarez.

Some of the multitude hold their beliefs just as strongly today as they did 50 years ago. Joseph F. Shelfhout is caretaker at the Queen of the Holy Rosary Mediatrix of Peace Shrine, Necedah. A Wrightstown native, he had known Fred Van Hoof there. Mrs. Van Hoof, Shelfhout told me, had wanted a smaller farm, and for that reason was steered to Juneau County. In 1950, Shelfhout’s brother, Ray, had asked him if he wanted to go down “where that lady is having visions.”

Oct. 7, after a rainy morning, Joseph saw it; the sun spinning toward the earth as pilgrims all around him fell to their knees in awe.

08-11-01

The Howe School

Little Nicky was happy... to be saying bye-bye to the dark, scary place that had been his asylum for eight months. Bye to the ancient three-story stone building that “loomed” above the hill like something out of a Gothic comic. Adios to the decrepit subterranean gothic where, if you had to go to the bathroom, you might have a close encounter with the monstrous octopus in the furnace room.

(For fun, you might even sneak down at your own risk and run up the stairs screaming and laughing at the same time.)

Bidding farewell to all that, Nicholas J. Brazeau and his classmates were in safe hands, walking single file along 8th Street, led by their kindergarten teacher, Mrs. La Marr.

It was April of 1951. Nick and his pals, David, Peter, Douglas, Karl, Kerry, Kent, Betsy, Judy, Jennifer, Marcia, Kitty and Sharon, were headed for the new school next door.

Records provided by Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools show Grace La Marr’s Howe school kindergarten class of 1950-51 divided into two classes of 46 and 42 pupils. They would be the last to attend old Howe school; it was about to be razed.

For much of its existence, Howe had been central to the cultural life of the city—as the Grand Rapids high school.

When it opened in 1877, old Howe was the next latest thing, constructed by hand of locally-quarried sandstone

with 17-foot high ceilings on the third floor. It rose from a swamp to the west and a forest to the east. The school yard, piled with four-foot cordwood, had to be fenced to keep out neighboring livestock.

The building was frontier-fashionable. But, problems began when it was found that a lumberman named Howe may have set aside or only promised to give \$10,000 for a school; if there was such a fund, it wasn’t available. The moral and legal controversy over the missing endowment caused a “blot” on the community’s reputation, according to a newspaper retrospective.

Instead of relying on the gift, a loan of the same amount had to be negotiated from the state. Six months after old new Howe was completed, public education was recessed when only half the year’s \$4,400 local taxes were able to be collected. Teachers continued to use the building on a “tuition” basis.

Old Howe was built as a grade and high school. It became solely a grade school early in the century upon construction of Lincoln high school a few blocks to the south.

Financial embarrassment dogged the board for years only to be relieved as the passing years brought increased prosperity.

Nick Brazeau’s grandfather, Theodore W. Brazeau, entered old Howe school in 1880 and graduated in 1891. In a reminiscence, he described a schoolyard covered with chunks of stone left over from construction. Pupils pelted each other with the remnants, resulting in many

minor injuries.

“Thede” Brazeau returned to the school as assistant principal in 1897 and taught mathematics and literature to high school students. He said the “bub-bler” was a water pail in the hall. Privies in the school yard were filthy and the interior was poorly lighted, poorly ventilated and a fire trap. “But some miracle has carried us through so far without any misfortune.”

Dr. F.X. Pomainville started at Howe school in first grade when it opened in 1877. He said children then had little respect for their teachers and vexed them by rolling croquet balls on the floor and blowing off fire crackers in the class rooms.

Among the prominent graduates of Howe high school were Corydon T. Purdy, architect; Charles Donneley, Northern Pacific railroad president; and F.E. Compton, Compton’s Encyclopedia editor.

Former principal Guy Stanton Ford, who organized the first high school football team here, became University of Minnesota president.

T.W. Brazeau said, “The old building has many fond recollections, but has outgrown its usefulness, and we are all happy to see it replaced by a modern, safe, sanitary building.”

Well, almost everybody...

Already in 1918, the question arose, “What should be done about old Howe school?”

In 1931, George W. Mead wrote to Chicago architects Childs and Smith for plans to remodel and expand the facility

but the Depression halted any further action until the matter was broached again in 1938 by William Thiele, a Mead associate and school board member. A federal grant application for an addition was denied because local funding did not seem to be available.

In the early 1940s, focus changed from remodeling the old to building anew, still with plans by Childs and Smith. Then came World War II and all such projects were suspended again.

After the war, the baby boom began to flood classrooms and something had to be done. A bond issue was floated by the city council for a new Howe school. Opposition arose from West-Siders, who pleaded for equal treatment and Mayor Carl Knudsen vetoed several council actions: "Not necessary; too expensive."

Eventually, the school board and city council asserted enough authority; funding was finally released to begin construction.

Completion, scheduled for Christmas of 1950, was delayed by tardy shipments of materials, strikes in manufacturing plants and bad weather.

Schools superintendent Floyd Smith reviewed all the city structures, in preparation for what he saw as a continued rebuilding program.

The most pressing need was to replace Edison school (1916), near Grand Avenue and 17th Avenue, with a "unit" similar to Howe. This would placate the West Siders.

Also on the West Side was Emerson (1885), no longer suitable for school purposes, Smith said, as it was located

in a noisy, dirty industrial area (near Consolidated).

Though its classrooms were small and its population base had shifted, Lowell (1923) could be converted to a primary school after the opening of Howe and the replacement for Edison.

On the East Side, Irving (1897) was old but had been updated. With a large potential enrollment in the area, Irving could be replaced by a new primary building, Smith suggested.

Lincoln high school had benefited by the opening of Howe as rooms on the third floor previously occupied by 7th and 8th grade were made available.

Smith said there was plenty of room at the south end of Lincoln for a vocational school and a previously-planned auditorium.

The biggest population increase at mid-century was in the east and south-east portions of Wisconsin Rapids and in the adjoining town of Grand Rapids. Smith said the city should consider taking steps to acquire land near the hospital for a primary school that would accommodate the pupils the ensuing decades would clearly see.

"The net aim is to give a splendid city a splendid system of school plants where approximately one fourth of the population centers its away from home educational interest for approximately one third of its lifetime."

Overcoming decades of impediments, Howe grade school was able to announce its open house May 20, 1951, with a 19-classroom building that could hold as many as 600 students. Modern in

function and appearance, Howe became the showcase school of the city, serving the city's most affluent neighborhoods.

A master plan for the grounds called for tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, an outdoor amphitheater and sliding hill.

A sample from new Howe kindergarten, fifty years ago: Leon Schmidt, Jr.—that big circle on the floor around which the children were seated; Larry Miller—the padded bench seat along the big, bright windows on the south side of the building; Nick—nap time.

Unlike Nicky, Leon and Larry, little David was miserable.

He didn't want to go.

Didn't want to say good-bye.

Didn't want to leave the nice, new ranch house his dad had built just a year earlier out in the subdivisions that were producing such a great plenty of his peers, nervously toting their pencil cases and notebooks along Airport, Cook and Two Mile Avenues.

Didn't want to leave the comfort of his mother, who was so nice to him. Didn't want to go to the big old school squatting at Two Mile and 8th Street that he didn't know anything about and where he didn't know anybody.

So his mother asked Paul Murgatroyd, a fifth grader from across the road, to help; and Paul, already a mentor, helped David along the half-mile walk from babyhood into the cold, cruel world.

09-11-01

NATATORIA

Dilapidated.”
 “Terrible.”
 “I think it should be condemned.” –Alderman Arthur Wittenberg.

“Looks like a dump.” –Alderman Peter Schneider. “It doesn’t look like a public swimming pool to me.”

Remarks prompted by the draining of the Wisconsin Rapids pool by Henry Becker Jr., lifeguard, so council members could get a first-hand view.

Not pretty: a cracked bottom with sharp, jagged pieces of concrete. “My youngster has had about 10 cuts this year,” said Mrs. Kenneth Fisher.

August 1951. Fifty years ago.

Fortunately for swimmers, there was a new pool in Biron at the community building. There was also Lake Wazeecha, where a 12-foot skiff, carrying nine persons from a picnic across to the south side beach, was swamped by the wake of another vessel and the mother of three struggling children swam more than half way across the lake to help her daughters stay afloat. All were saved by a rescue craft except for a 50-year-old grandfather who had, like the mother, helped smaller children stay afloat as long as he could.

Even newer than Wazeecha was “giant” Lake Petenwell, where, later, a Halloween storm marooned two area duck hunters in a small boat for over 20 hours in below-freezing temperatures.

Shaking from cold and turning purple, the two had to stand up and cling to

partly submerged trees to keep the boat from capsizing.

Rapids joined a long list of cities that added fluorine to drinking water as a tooth decay preventative, prompted by its own Dr. Glenn Bennett, president of the Wisconsin State Dental society. The fluorine supplement was made possible by a 1950 addition to the 16th Street pumping station. Some viewed fluorine, a.k.a. fluoride, with suspicion and noted that more dangerous substances could be substituted by mischief-makers.

Not enjoying the benefits of municipal water was the town of Grand Rapids, which then included “Sand Hill.” The 1950 census showed a Grand Rapids population increase from 2,358 in 1940 to 4,142.

The population of Wisconsin Rapids in 1950 was tabulated at 13,496, an increase of 2,080.

One of the new Rapids residents had a problem. An infant born with tumors was taken to St. Joseph’s hospital, Marshfield, where a 12-inch section of her intestine was removed. Because she had lost so much blood, not until it was almost over, did staff administer ether. To ease her pain, the child was offered whiskey on a sponge.

Marilyn “Peewee” Malicke, 10, confined to a wheelchair while recovering from rheumatic fever, wanted a watch, so her 9th Street pals, Kathleen Sullivan, Kathleen Halverson, Sharon Wefel and Jerry Bassler, put on a circus that raised \$1.47.

Jacqueline Malicke, 12, acted as a

fortuneteller. “You will take a long trip and make much money,” she told one patron. “Later in life you will marry Kathleen Halverson.”

On the other side of the timeline was Laura Biron, the daughter of Francis Biron, local industrialist and founder of Biron village. With her 1951 death, the family name was extinguished here. Born in the Biron village “White House,” the heiress had been a patient at the county hospital in Marshfield for 27 years.

“Home for the Aged Cemetery.”

A reporter read the sign and described “an equally weather-beaten cross” at the northern limits of Port Edwards village. The patch of weeds had been abandoned three years previous and contained the graves of 99 former residents of the Wood County Home for the Aged, buried at county expense.

Of 97 markers, only one had been “dignified” with a name. Metal numbers identified the others.

MEDIATRIX REDUX: A thousand persons came to the farm home of Mrs. Mary Anna Van Hoof, Necedah, on the anniversary of her vision of the Virgin Mary a year previous. With no new revelations promised, the crowd didn’t enter the property but lined its fences in a pouring rain. Mrs. Van Hoof appeared briefly but said and did nothing notable.

A shrine in the yard had been dismantled on the orders of Archbishop Moses E. Kiley of Milwaukee. The official Vatican newspaper warned Catholics that Van Hoof’s visions were false.

According to a *Tribune* writer, every community develops its own unique character, molded by the people who live there. Once established, this basic nature is seldom altered, as Dr. Frank Starr, 86, former principal of Centralia high school discovered when he returned from Los Angeles for an old-timers get-together during the National Cranboree.

Yet, the town had grown so! Streets, lawns, modern houses. The development along the river. The paper mill. "The only thing you don't have is a new bridge...Better get at that." When the old bridge had washed away in 1880, Starr rowed passengers across in a flat-boat for a dime a ride.

"The Nekoosa bridge—that too narrow, profanity-provoking structure spanning the Wisconsin River on Highway 73 which is approached by a simulated ski slide on the east side and a reasonable facsimile of a corkscrew on the west," said the *Tribune*, was probably the only bridge that had its construction delayed by a buried whiskey bottle.

As the story went, free whiskey to the voters of Saratoga was meant to persuade them to vote in favor of the bridge. But the Irishman in charge of distribution buried the jugs on the riverbank where they were in turn discovered and the whiskey consumed by several young fellows.

The bridge was voted down but finally built in 1915.

At a meeting of the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, local attorney Theodore Brazeau reviewed the 1922 trial that

had come to be used as a model in legal textbooks. A bomb, mailed to the rural Marshfield home of county board chairman John A. Chapman, killed Mrs. Chapman and blew off Chapman's arm.

Brazeau was appointed by the circuit court to discover the perpetrator and prosecute him.

As a result of Brazeau's work, John Magnuson was convicted of the murder through circumstantial evidence alone, one of the first such successes.

The *Tribune* noted that many old folks were nostalgic about the Hotel Witter, razed in favor of the new Hotel Mead. The scene of "gay parties and elaborate social gatherings" had offered "luxurious hospitality" to travelers that included the likes of William Jennings Bryan. For many locals, it had been a stately meeting place.

Early in 1951, a group of Norwegian pulp and paper representatives toured Tri-City mills. Admiring American productivity, a spokesman said, "Our mill employees just don't want to work very hard," noting that there was little incentive because consumer goods were scarce and wages low.

Another visitor was one of Hollywood's "top-ranking" motion picture stars, Dennis Morgan, visiting as part of a film industry promotion.

The former Marshfield resident was the former Stanley Morner.

He told Kiwanis club members at the American Legion hall that, "Most of what progress the Commies made in Hollywood came from their own adver-

tising. They fastened their dirty label on everything that was liberal and good."

Morgan recalled visits to Rapids as a Marshfield athlete. "We used to do pretty well in football but we had a tough time in basketball."

Despite Morgan's memories, the 1951 Rapids-Marshfield grid tussle resulted in a 46-0 Rapids victory.

Russ Stimac raced up the middle for 79 yards and a touchdown on the first possession and added four more touchdowns in "as great an individual performance as Beell stadium has ever seen," said the *Tribune* of the Marshfield performance. Stimac carried the ball 10 times and gained 281 yards.

Quite a stench was raised on Third Street, according to the *Tribune*, when Charley Chamberlain, caretaker at the E.W. Ellis residence, set a trap to catch a rat but caught a skunk instead.

It's very simple, Police Chief R. J. Exner told Chamberlain. Just tie a rag to the end of a fish pole and dip it into chloroform, hold the anesthetic up to the skunk's nose and after it falls asleep, release it. Chamberlain said he didn't want to get that close, so Exner sent out a skunk squad, in the persons of Officer Wilfred Gloden and Reinhart Steege.

When the rag was near its nose, the skunk bit into it and drifted into slumber as predicted. "I ain't setting no more traps for rats," said Chamberlain as he went back to his garden. "Next time I'll use poison."

10-13-01

Army Men

Army men.
That's what we called them.

Not "soldiers" though they looked the part.

Khaki-green. Helmeted, armed with rifles, a few pistols. Bazookas.

If the army men had been left in the heat too long, the barrels of their rifles bent. If they bore nicks and wounds, it happened in combat among the hills and rivers we had made with sandbox machinery and the garden hose.

Army men.

You bought them at Woolworth's. Molded of plastic, packed in plastic bags, "Made in Japan."

M*A*S*H*: The satiric movie and television show about the medical unit in Korea, where, 50 years ago, the U.S. was fighting a forgotten war.

M*A*S*H*, in which medical base antics frequently are interrupted when helicopters descend with the latest casualties. Victims of what the main character, Hawkeye, sees as the senseless war to end senseless wars.

M*A*S*H*

U.S.: 160,000 casualties, 55,000 dead.

South Korea: 400,000 casualties, 58,000 dead, 165,000 missing.

Communist China: 945,000 dead or wounded.

North Korea: 522,000 dead or wounded.

M*A*S*H*

Summer 1950: After World War II, the peninsula of Korea was seized from its long-time ruler, recently defeated-Japan, and divided at the 38th "parallel" into roughly equal zones. Russia occupied the north; the U.S., the south.

The U.S. turned over political control to the newly formed "Republic of Korea" and removed its last troops in 1949, opting to say sayonara forever to the peninsula attached to China and tucked behind Japan.

No such luck. On June 25, 1950, the North Korean People's Army marched into the South. Almost immediately, as part of a United Nations action, U.S. President Truman ordered air, naval and ground forces to slow the advance.

Unfortunately, American occupation forces in Japan were not well-prepared or equipped and suffered a miserable series of losses. North Korea soon controlled almost the entire country.

The Americans regrouped, retrained and re-supplied. In September 1950, a surprise attack by troops under Gen. Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.N. forces, changed the course of the war in favor of the UN, at least for awhile.

MacArthur crossed into North Korea and captured its capital, Pyongyang. The enemy appeared to be defeated. Confident Americans advanced toward the Yalu river, the border with China. MacArthur wanted to end the war before Christmas and did not heed stern Chinese warnings against further advances.

Among the victims of the early war

was Sgt. Richard T. Stone, 32, a career army man, killed in action on the drive to Seoul, Sept. 25, 1950. The 1936 Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln graduate and former Consolidated employee came home a year later to be buried in Forest Hill cemetery with military rites by Hagerstrom-Rude Post 9, American Legion.

Late 1950: Comic book drawing: the defiant, big-biceped American who fired again and again until the gun glowed red... but they kept coming, an endless maniacal shrieking yellow horde of Reds with no respect for human life, including their own. When more than 300,000 Chinese People's Liberation Army troops crossed into North Korea, U.S. divisions, so recently victorious, were forced into massive retreat. The situation seemed so desperate that use of the atomic bomb against China was discussed.

To aid the North Korean army of 250,000, Communist China sent almost 800,000 men. In opposition, the South Korean army numbered about 600,000 plus 480,000 Americans and 40,000 UN troops from other countries.

To help fill the ranks, the selective service office in the Wood County courthouse employed a full-time clerk, Mrs. Lillian Hornigold, wife of a prominent Lincoln high school teacher. As of December 1950, 75 young men had been inducted from Wood County with 91 more on the list for early 1951.

In the period leading up to November 1951, the conflict reached what was often called a "stalemate." Bloody bat-

tles like Heartbreak Ridge, in which the Communists lost seven men for every UN soldier wounded or killed, helped “hold the line” while the difficult truce talks proceeded.

In the midst of the conflict, a local soldier, whom I will call Sgt. “Richard,” was interviewed for the June 8, 1951, *Daily Tribune*. The first Korean veteran to return home to Wisconsin Rapids under the army’s rotation system, the 21-year-old Lincoln High school graduate enlisted in December 1948, and saw 10 months of combat, having landed in South Korea just after the North Korean invasion.

Richard said he resented the phrase, “police action.” According to the *Tribune*, his account “leaves no doubt that a grim, full-scale war is going on over there.”

Ill-prepared to stop the first onslaught, his group only expected to slow it. “All we had was infantry, and the leader of the first platoon counted 104 tanks. None of the weapons we had there did any good against them.”

Casualties piled up quickly in the first weeks of fighting, but Richard’s division won the presidential unit citation and a citation from the South Korean government for its delaying action.

The situation had changed by the time of the June interview. American airplanes destroyed the enemy’s tank corps and the UN was now well-prepared with its own tanks, artillery support, bazookas, machine guns and replacement troops.

But the Chinese legions remained formidable, said Sgt. Richard. “They move up about dark, 500 yards from your positions. Then they start crawling. It’ll take them four hours to crawl 500 yards. They’ve got a lot of patience.” To detect these night fighters, the UN/U.S. army had begun using searchlights.

Many Chinese were armed with “burp guns,” said Richard, “and they love to use grenades.” The enemy also had U.S. rifles and submachine guns captured from the Chinese Nationalists, who had been defeated earlier by the Communists. “In case you’re unlucky,” he remarked, “it’s better to be captured by the Chinese than the North Koreans.”

Life in Korea was much less advanced than it had been in Japan, Richard noted, but as for the people, “They both sleep on the floor.”

“When you go in and liberate a town the civilians seem to be happy, North Koreans as well as South Koreans. They’re happy to see the fighting go north.”

The Wisconsin Rapids GI claimed to be too busy to pay much attention to the Korean feminine population but he said, “They were getting better looking all the time!”

Richard chuckled when he recalled an amphibious landing made by the First Cavalry division on the east coast of Korea. The cavalry men arrived on the beaches in landing craft only to find a truck battalion already in place, waiting to take them north.

In 1918, on the “11th hour of the 11th

day of the 11th month,” World War I, the war to end war, concluded by means of an armistice. In the following year, November 11 was set aside as Armistice Day. In 1953, after “Korea,” it became Veterans’ Day. In 1971, President Nixon declared Veterans’ Day a federal holiday observed on the second Monday in November.

According to the *Tribune* of Saturday, Nov. 10, 1951, that year’s Armistice Day would be “business as usual” in Korea, meaning continued attacks on a line of Communist-held hills defended with small arms, automatic weapons, mortars and hand grenades. Meanwhile, the U.S. disarmament proposal was called a “three-act comedy” by Russian leaders.

In the summer of 2001, straggling in from the new FDR memorial, my family visited the Korean War Veterans Memorial. It was relatively secluded. Most of the crowds of that year were headed for the Vietnam wall and then the snow cone stand.

At the memorial, in the sweltering heat so typical of the nation’s capital, the 19 larger-than-life soldiers were cloaked in ponchos as they trudged collectively toward their individual fates. Each would seem to be alone with his thoughts on the long trail to Heartbreak Ridge. The men of the forgotten war.

The army men.

11-10-01

Pew Doodles

What do you do in church? Especially if the service happens to be late at night after a big meal and too much who knows what? If you're like some church-goers, you nod off for a nap; but I prefer to think of things to write on donation envelopes I find in the pew.

But if you believe in either Santa Claus or the baby Jesus, Christmas has a magic attached to no other day. Hopefully, the weather is crisp and the snow mysterious. The decorations and lights: inspiring. And people are so much better than their usual selfish selves, right?

Another difference: it's getting close to midnight. Ma should be in her kerchief and pa in his cap, fast asleep. But on Christmas Eve, we're still awake!

Yes, I have doodled in what is one of Wisconsin Rapids' finest and oldest religious establishments. Up along the river, in our oldest east side neighborhood is the mother of Catholic churches: SS Peter & Paul. Bearing a name with one-too-many saints, it is called, "Ess Ess."

A step into SS is a journey into the tradition of Roman Catholicism. The pillars along each side of the sanctuary support arches reminiscent of Rome. And midnight mass celebrates a long succession of Christmas Eves. Evergreen and candles for the season. Lights dimmed, incense burning and, on what can be the coldest night of the year, more than the illusion of warmth.

Cold and dark. The priest will tell you there is so much of it this time of year. Leave for work and return home in the dark. Beyond that, there's plenty of "dark" in the world. The priest will tell you it's not so much different than in the time of Jesus. That's why people prayed that "Emmanuel" would light up a desperate world.

In the 1830s, a few shacks not far from S.S.P.P. housed French-Catholic lumbermen and fur traders who were offered the first mass here by Father Van den Broeck, out of the green Bay. A few years later, the first Catholic church was built on the "other," west side of the river.

By 1857, Catholics on the East Side could support their own parish due to Francis Biron, "a good, rich and generous Canadian."

A second, more substantial church started its term as a long-lived city landmark in 1873. An 1874 map shows it at Church and Mill streets, a block removed from a large sawmill complex on the river.

As SS continued to develop:

1886: A Catholic school opens in the old parish residence. The Notre Dame sisters of Milwaukee in charge.

1895: New four-room school.

1904: Polish Catholics build St. Lawrence church on the West Side.

1905: Grand Rapids becomes part of the Diocese of La Crosse

1924: Christmas Eve. At minus 12 degrees, a fire in the school building just completed by A.F. Billmeyer causes a

comedy of errors: frozen hydrants, broken hoses, ice-covered firemen on too short ladders, with a sick fire chief and nuns bailing water.

1925: A new \$100,000 school.

1931: New sisters' residence.

Because of the booms (baby, building and religious), there is also a Catholicism boom in 1951: three parishes with a combined membership of 6,500; more than 2,300 families; 981 pupils in three Catholic grade schools.

In 1947, West-Siders, who organized in the convent chapel of SS. Peter & Paul, form Our Lady Queen of Heaven (St. Mary's) parish. Early masses are held at the Palace and Wisconsin theaters. Designed by the A.F. Billmeyer & Son, the school opens in 1949. First services are held in an attached auditorium on Easter 1951. It is anticipated that the auditorium will become a gymnasium when a church building is constructed.

In September 1951, Tri-City Catholic High school opens on the second floor of "St. Mary's" school with 34 ninth-grade pupils.

Also in 1951, a new rectory at St. Lawrence Catholic church is dedicated and blessed by Bishop John P. Treacy of La Crosse. The dedication coincides with the 25th anniversary of the ordination of Rev. Florian A. Marmurowicz, who had been at St. Lawrence since 1949.

"All things come to him who waits," counsels Rev. P.J. Wagner. He has fulfilled a 30-year dream of a combination grotto garden, parochial school and now a church in the village of Rudolph.

The “Tudor Gothic” design by Carl Billmeyer resembles SS. Peter and Paul, which until 1878, the Catholics of Rudolph had attended. Wagner had been in charge of the parish since 1921, erecting a large brick building which served as school and church combined until the new church building was opened.

It seems ancient, SS. Peter & Paul, the church that this story began with but it’s not. In 1951, it is brand new. The congregation of 1,300 families had outgrown their old structure and built what the *Tribune* called a “magnificent stone edifice,” seating 776. It had been dedicated a month earlier as Bishop Treacy led a procession into a sanctuary overflowing with a crowd of 1,000. According to the *Tribune*, the \$400,000 building is of Romanesque design with an exterior of Winona limestone. General contractor is Frank J. Henry.

A.F. Billmeyer & Son, once again the architect, comments: “set at an angle in the block, the structure makes an impressive picture to motorists traveling north on First street. The position also permits direct sunlight into the church from all four sides.”

The “Son” of the Billmeyer firm is Carl Billmeyer, a former student at SS. Peter & Paul school.

The interior continues exterior themes: vast size and simple beauty, according to the *Tribune*. Corinthian columns of Botticino marble; oak beams; magnetite flooring in the aisles; light oak fixtures and woodwork. Women saints honored in windows on the east side and

male saints on the west side. “Conspicuously set above the main entrance of the church is a spiral rose window ... ten feet in diameter.”

“In the sanctuary the ceiling is gold-gilded and the walls peach-colored. When light shines through the windows, the walls turn a deep rose.”

Modern touches related to sound: ten loud speakers in the ceiling; a cry room complete with a loudspeaker (incoming); a microphone built into the marble lectern stand. In the balcony, a \$12,000 Wicks organ hidden behind a screen.

What about the 1873 frame structure a block to the east?

Rev. Carl Dockendorff, an assistant pastor, says the “ancient” frame structure will be razed for a parking lot. Pews and other furnishings will be put up for sale.

Memorial windows?

Regretfully according to Dockendorff, the parish has no way of storing the glass and would have to give up the windows. He supposes that those who want to, could obtain the windows from the wrecking company after the contract has been let for demolition.

The *Tribune* calls the Rt. Rev. Msgr. C.W. Gille the “spiritual leader of the flock which will gather in the new church.” Msgr. Gill, SS pastor for six years, is also “vicar-general” of the La Crosse Diocese. The “genial priest,” of French-Irish descent, is a native of Shullsburg, Wis., a graduate of Marquette university high school in Milwaukee and St. Paul Seminary, St. Paul,

Minn. His first appointment was in 1919 to the Vesper Catholic church, which had missions in Altdorf, Sigel and Arpin. In winter, Father Gille drove teams to these outlying churches. He stayed 10 years at Vesper, returning to Wood County in 1946 to fill the post at S.S. left vacant by the death of Rt. Rev. Msgr. William Reding.

Don’t you feel good when you walk out of church, especially on Christmas Eve? Just like you feel when you’ve finished an article like this. You’re a better person now, and you’ve been freed from confinement.

After Christmas Eve midnight mass, there’s something else. It’s not Christmas Eve any more. It’s Christmas day.

12-08-01

Stinkin' Town

“Why do we stay in this stinking town?”

Wiping away tears, you say your eyes burn from the short walk to McMillan library. The eyes, you say, they don't burn like that anywhere else: “Some of the highest cancer rates are in south Wood County.”

“Maybe...”

It's true that if you drive in from Rudolph on Highway 34, you know there's something nefarious in the air. Is it the smell of money? Not as soothing now that we're not world headquarters any more.

In fact, River City is slipping. The downtown is greatly reduced. Bad neighborhoods deteriorate. Good homes in good neighborhoods: razed for progress. Kids with “nothing to do” light out for Plover. Old folk can only wave to grandchildren on the other side of 8th Street, unable to negotiate the traffic. Insiders don't like outsiders and newcomers can't break into the cliques. Where can you find an intelligent conversation anymore? Always a lot of complaints about this stinking town.

What about 50 years ago? The town didn't even hardly stink then. There was no Kraft mill. If your nose got a shot of sulfur, it came from Nekoosa.

But there was this:

A Brooklyn, N.Y. woman, visiting for a month, wrote the *Tribune* that she had received a “cold welcome.” In her opinion our city was “more dead than alive.”

“Why not do something to awaken it—like fun for the young and old?”

Replied a *Tribune* editorialist: Rapids must seem dull to a person accustomed to the tumultuous excitement and turmoil of Brooklyn. “Having once resided in that metropolis, experiencing the daily joys of battling the subway crowds between Bay Ridge and Midtown Manhattan, we can readily understand why Brooklynites feel a sense of frustration when exposed to the peace and calm of the hinterlands.”

“Perhaps we ought to dig a subway down Grand avenue, with a tunnel under the river, instead of planning another bridge. And we might re-christen our Wisconsin Rapids White Sox as the Dodgers- ‘dem bums.’” Nevertheless, joked the commentary, nothing could reproduce the flavor (and aroma) of Brooklyn.

“The thing that disturbs us most about our eastern visitor's complaint is not that she considers our city ‘more dead than alive’ (for she really hasn't been here long enough to fairly judge its merit) but that she feels her reception was a ‘cold one.’”

If she were referring to the weather, the editorialist said, that's something that can't be helped. But if she inferred that the community's hospitality is not what it should be, “then we're truly sorry. Strangers are the best judge of that quality – and we ought to take their criticism to heart. We think we know just how she feels—in fact, we felt the same way when we spent the loneliest months of our life in Brooklyn.”

If Grand Avenue could seem cold, the cold war against “communism” was 40-below. Writer James Marlow asked, from Washington, D.C., “What progress since Pearl Harbor?”

Marlow was glad the U.S. had assumed world leadership, even if it had been through necessity, not choice. We acted to save our own skins, he said, first against fascism, later against communism.

“The roots of decay – political, economic, and social – may be so deep in that ruin is inevitable anyway; or maybe our leadership has been too little or too late or too shoddy.”

It took the shock of Korea in the summer of 1950 to wake the county up, said Marlow. In his view, we still were not re-arming as fast as we could in the face of the communist threat. “Is this a repetition of the mistake before Pearl Harbor. We'll find out if there's another Pearl Harbor.”

Despite a stray letter to the editor to the contrary, some Rapids citizens hoped to make the world a friendlier place. The Mayor's Committee on Human Rights, appointed by Mayor C.C. Knudsen, included representatives for the entire tri-cities area. Officers were: chairman A.W. Zellmer, vice-chairman W.A. Sprise and secretary-treasurer C.E. Otto, *Tribune* editor.

The group had sponsored United Nations day here and the Wisconsin Idea Theater show, “Mr. Human Being,” which promoted equal rights, regardless of color, race or creed.

The land of the Flying Carpet.

Baghdad, the 1952 destination of former Rapids-area residents, the Fred Locher family. To help provide technical assistance to underdeveloped nations, Locher had accepted an appointment as consultant to the directorate-general of irrigation for Iraq.

On leave of absence from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, he also had worked for three years in the Rapids state highway commission office.

Explained the *Tribune*: Iraq, "cradle of the human race," is a tiny country in southwestern Asia, lying between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In Baghdad, a city of 500,000, the Lochers would join 84 Americans, most connected with the American embassy.

Syndicated columnist Hal Boyle noted that more fads, gadgets, ideas and ways of life had gone "down the drain" in the first half of the 20th century than in any other similar period. Some are no longer part of our vocabulary. Some have returned to vogue.

The bustle. Bell-bottomed trousers. Whale-boned corsets. Hobble skirt. The vest. Red flannel underwear. Linen dust-ers and goggles. Handlebar mustache and mustache cup. Straight-edged razors. Sideburns. Spit curls. The hairpin. Two-bit haircut. Five-cent glass of beer. Free lunch. Nickel hotdog. Penny candy. The five-cent telephone call. Cuspidors. Smelling salts. Foot-powered player piano. Phonograph with horn on it. Radio headphones.

Minstrel shows and miniature golf courses. Knickers. Silent movies. Wet

martinis. Spiked beer and bathtub gin. The turkey trot and bunny hug. The flap-per. "Twenty-three skidoo."

Covered bridges. Cobblestone streets. Old ladies driving electric automobiles. Mah jong. Champagne baths. Flag-pole sitters. Marathon dances. Amateur sports. Pogo sticks. Cigar store Indians. Homemade bread. Big, thick steaks.

Quiet evenings at home.

"Whew! What have we got left," said Boyle, above, "besides television sets and congress?"

Besides early century ephemera, local names and institutions of 1952 have been swept into the dustbin of history.

"Nepco?"

In 1951-52, the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. experienced its greatest expansion and modernization program to that point, according to John Alexander, president and general manager.

"Consolidated?"

As 1951 came to a close, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. expected an all-time high in sales, according to Stanton W. Mead, president and general manager.

"Consoweld?"

Shortages of materials slowed production of the company's decorative plastic sheets in 1952.

"Ahdawagam?"

The paperboard division of Consolidated was busy expanding in 1952.

"Prentiss Wabers?"

Known as "Preway," the defense contractor also saw a good market for apartment gas ranges in 1952.

Although business was not good in

the world of clothing makers, Harvard Clothes Inc. was able to keep operating at capacity, said Paul H. Daube, president of L.L. Rosenthal & Co., Chicago, of which Harvard was a subsidiary.

"So why do we stay in this stinking town?"

Because it's not Brooklyn. It's not Kabul. And it's not Appleton, although it might be soon.

Tumultuous excitement and turmoil? Not. Dangerous? Not. Expensive? Not, relatively.

Crowded? Not usually. Streets? In good repair. Snow? Plowed. Parks? Lots and pretty.

Highlights? Performing Arts Center. Cultural Center. Hotel Mead. McMillan library.

Our family doctors, dentists, bankers, lawyers.

Schools? Premium. Friends? Many. People: mostly decent.

Home? Yes.

You and I...

We have walked these streets since we pulled on our boat neck shirts and headed for the Palace to hear the Zakons.

Smell? Most of the time, the wind blows it out toward Vesper.

I forgot to mention the South Wood County Historical Corp. Without the support of that non-profit institution and its director, Pam Walker, these remarks of 2001-2 would never have been made. In no other stinking town would River City Memoirs see the light of day.

01-12-02

Tail Gunner Joe

Probably the most famous ad ever printed in River City, filling most of the back page of the January 21, 1952, *Daily Tribune*. “We, the undersigned citizens of this community, declare ourselves against the menace of McCarthyism.” Jean Nash, Gloria B. Schneider, Harry R. Klappa, William J. Taylor, Carl C. Knudsen, Gerald W. Hierl, F.X. Pomainville, Mary Y. Ritchie, C.A. Searles, Gilbert K. Dickerman, Frank R. Fey, Wm. Bonow and Wm. L. Miller.

Would you have joined the list? It could have ended a promising career.

The statement was inspired by an appearance here of U.S. senator Joseph R. McCarthy, a self-proclaimed war hero nicknamed “Tailgunner Joe.” The Appleton Republican would speak to the local chamber of commerce at the dining hall of the new SS. Peter & Paul Catholic church. Admired by many Americans, including my father, McCarthy was abhorred by others for his accusations that numerous public figures were “card-carrying” Communists.

On January 3, Jean Nash, a Wisconsin Rapids cranberry grower, wrote to her brother, Philleo Nash, a member of the Truman administration in Washington, D.C. “The opportunity seems to be at hand to strike some kind of minor blow at McCarthy but if I participate I’m going to need both advice and material.”

Jean said she had sent a protest to the Chamber sponsoring the event. “I also

stopped at the Post Office to talk to Joe Wheir to see if there weren’t Democrats in town, who are also members of the chamber, who ought to be objecting.”

The same day, Milton Schneider, a Democrat, discussed with Wheir his wife’s displeasure with the McCarthy appearance. The mutual interest was relayed and within the hour, Gloria Schneider called Jean Nash and said she wanted to talk.

Said Philleo Nash: “I suspect that Senator McCarthy has been stung by an advertisement in my home town paper, the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*, ‘Citizens Versus McCarthy,’ which appeared last Monday and was sponsored by a representative group of Wisconsin Rapids citizens, including my sister.”

All 13 signers reaffirmed their stand “against the menace of McCarthyism.”

Harry Klappa: “McCarthy’s machine worked hard to find something on somebody in Wisconsin Rapids.”

Mayor Knudsen: “I still stand by my conviction that a man is innocent until proven guilty.”

Alderman William Bonow: “I think if McCarthy had any proof of his charges he would make them out in the open.”

Frank R. Fey: “If the paid advertisement in the Wisconsin Rapids *Tribune* on McCarthyism helped to develop discussion and thought on a controversial issue, I as one of the signers consider the advertisement worthwhile.”

“This type of attack is exactly what the ad criticized,” said Mrs. Milt (Gloria) Schneider. “I don’t know Mr. Nash

but I am inclined to agree with the New York *Times* that there must be some good in anyone whom this demagogue accuses.”

Jean Nash said her brother had “used the right words” in commenting on the charges. “We would jump at the chance to sue for libel if McCarthy were to repeat the charges without senatorial immunity. I have no doubt that he (McCarthy) said those things because I signed the advertisement,” said Miss Nash.

“I am an independent voter and I signed it because McCarthy is destroying civil liberties and I feel very strongly about it.”

Days after he attacked Nash in the Senate, McCarthy repeated his statement in a Milwaukee speech by reading his own remarks about Nash from the Congressional Record. McCarthy claimed he was talking without the usual Congressional immunity and offered to supply Nash with a tape recording for use in a lawsuit.

Nash said that his attorneys attempted for several months to get the tape recording from McCarthy, but that the senator never produced one.

Rapids mayor Knudsen received a letter dated January 25 from one of Wisconsin’s most-published writers. August Derleth, Sauk City, wrote, “It is only by such forthright stand as yours against the menace of Nazi-Soviet-like demagoguery rearing its ugly head in our midst that everything worth preserving in our great nation will survive. Support of McCarthy and mccarthyism is treason to our country.”

McCarthy said, as reported in the January 30, *New York Post*, that he did not know Nash's sister had signed the advertisement. The only thing he knew about her was that she and Nash were born in Wisconsin Rapids.

"All I did was give the stuff from the loyalty board, the FBI reports as they appeared in the loyalty board," McCarthy said. "If it isn't correct, the loyalty board can say so."

For his part, Truman uttered his most caustic comments to that date, denouncing McCarthy as a pathological character assassin.

McCarthy said the President should answer a few questions about one of his aides instead of sidestepping the issue by name calling.

From Jean, February 1, 1952: "Joe Wheir called to say that McCarthy's attack on you was the rottenest thing he had ever heard of." Furthermore, a member of a prominent Republican family handed Joe a bill and said, "Don't tell anybody, but put this where it will do the most good."

Jean: "Gloria Schneider said that the night the attack appeared in our paper Art Treutel came over with tears in his eyes and said 'What can we do?' Emily [Mead Baldwin] came up this morning to make her peace and has just left. She said she lost five pounds the day before our statement came out. She saw in her mind the work of ten years organizing the republican county group deteriorat-

ing before her eyes. She said 'I didn't have anything to do with McCarthy's attack on Philleo.'

"I told her I never thought for a minute that either she or [husband] Henry had anything to do with it but that I couldn't say the same for other people in town."

Reported by Peter Edson, February 13: "When a reporter started to ask Nash about his alleged Commie connections, the ex-cranberry king replied, 'Cranberries are red, aren't they?'"

Nash: "I'm no Alger Hiss and they've got nothing on me. I'm clean as can be."

From Philleo to Jean, February 27, 1952:

"McCarthy has been silent about me since the Milwaukee speech. He has been repeatedly asked for the recording, but has still not provided it. The newspapers know this...Do not be discouraged or uneasy. I am keeping the question of a libel suit open and alive and will not hesitate to act if it seems the right thing to do at the right time.

"After talking to these people from Wisconsin, I am fully alive to the pressure they are under and that they share your feeling that some positive action is needed to clear the air. I will make my decision on the legal facts in the situation. You cannot win an election in a courtroom. I am as relaxed as I have ever been in all my life, and I am feeling no pain."

Edith, the widow of Philleo Nash included McCarthy-era reminiscences in her autobiography, "My Life on the Left."

"I was interviewed many times by messengers from various investigative agencies, both at home and at the Georgetown Day School where I ran the office. The questions about various friends were always the same and became a litany in my memory: 'Was he a member of the Communist Party?' 'Did he advocate the overthrow of the U.S. Government?' And then 'Did he have nude parties in the backyard?' or 'Did he socialize with Negroes?'"

A statement by Carl Knudsen, mayor of Wisconsin Rapids, to be published in *The Nation*, August 30, 1952, taken from his typescript:

"In an attempt to discredit persons and programs with which he disagrees McCarthy has used methods so crude and irrational that the methods have become an end in themselves. He has used smear and intimidation as a club to destroy the very civil liberties that distinguish American from Communist and fascist nations."

Words from own mayor, fifty years ago, where it happened, in River City.

02-09-02

Paul

How tonight!
The youngest theater owner pulls his coaster wagon through the neighborhood, hawking his repertoire; clips of locals taken with his dad's camera; an educational strip; comics to be run forward and then backward when a double feature is wanted.

January 1938. The theater that 13-year-old Paul Gross has set up consists of a homemade stage and 25 folding chairs in the cellar of his parents' home. A promising start for the young man who is to become, through a series of movies and videotapes, the pre-eminent pictorial chronicler of River City.

Years after his beginnings in the movie game, Gross was hating his first "real job," peddling shoes at Johnson Hill's department store, when Ron Desper and Mike Stewart sat down as if they were customers. Was Gross interested in becoming an apprentice at the Wisconsin theater, where they worked as projectionists? "My God, I thought I died and went to Heaven," Gross said in an interview this year [2002].

The owner of the theater, Mrs. Harriet Eckhardt, "hated Ron," said Gross. "Because when the Wisconsin got built, these guys waited until it all got in motion and then they went on strike to be unionized, meaning each of the three theaters had to have two projectionists. That raised heck with their budget. In those days, unions were so strong that, during the brief strike, attendance at the three theaters dropped right off."

Gross said the Palace, a building that now houses the Central Wisconsin Cultural Center, 240 Johnson St., was the favorite of the projectionists. It had a Spanish motif. Lights dimmed artfully, a "cloud machine" moved shapes across the ceiling and stars flickered on the ceiling.

Mrs. Eckhardt and her husband also had remodeled the Ideal Theater, said Gross, and changed the name to "Rapids," later owned by the Stark family and then Tom Poulos of the Sugar Bowl restaurant. It is now Rogers Cinema, 220 E. Grand Ave.

After his 1941 graduation from Lincoln High School, Gross was called to Consolidated's Biron paper mill lab. "The war had started. They were hiring like crazy and paying real good."

In 1943, he left Biron to enter military service. The year after the war's end, he returned to the lab. "I wanted to go out on dates and all this kind of stuff. I thought, boy would it be good to have a day job, so I asked to get transferred to the office at Biron. Jeez, that was the most boring job I ever had in my life, sitting there making out payroll checks all day long. So I quit and went to Alaska."

In the summer of 1947, Gross returned from Alaska and tried the freelance movie game. The first show site was downtown Rudolph. But when Main Street merchants bickered about who should pay and how much, Gross decided once there was enough.

The usual Monday show was sponsored by Rose and Roy's root beer stand at a field on the north side of Baker

Street in the vicinity of the present Quality Foods IGA. "We used to get over 500 people jammed in there. Made about 35 bucks for a night."

Other locations for free shows included the corner of Griffith and 8th Street; the village of Bancroft; the Vesper bandstand; the Port Edwards School; and the Biron community hall on a screen painted on the wall. Exclusively viewed in black-and-white were previews, cartoons and feature films, "same as in the theater, but they were older ones."

After attending a Michigan watchmaker school on the GI bill, Gross, in 1948, apprenticed under jeweler Earl Larson at Johnson Hill's, "the only air-conditioned store in town."

Johnson Hill's was a full-service department store on four levels. In the basement: meat, groceries and hardware. Clothes and shoes on the first floor. Offices and a restaurant on the mezzanine. "We all used to congregate up there before the store opened."

Sport shop. Beauty parlor. Bakery. Tailor. One-stop shopping. A "tube system" transported payments and receipts. Gross said at least one office gal sent a watch to him for repair via the tube.

He noted many employees had been with the firm for many years. "At five o'clock," Larson told him, "it looked like the old folks home letting out."

When Johnson Hill's was built, Gross said, it was called "the Marshall Field's of the north" and much of the stock was obtained through the Chicago firm. Gross said Johnson Hill's owner Ray Johnson prided himself on copying what

his friends at the Prange's department store of Green Bay did. "He'd have store meetings and tell how you did this and that and he tried to run a fine store."

The day in 1951 that Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln won the state basketball tournament, Gross was preparing for his watchmaker's license exam to be held the following Monday in Milwaukee. On Sunday, when the team came back from Madison and "half the town" went out to meet the victors at Smoky Joe's Corners, Gross was still studying. He told his wife to go to the celebration without him. "Tomorrow, we're leaving for Milwaukee. I just gotta keep practicing."

When he had worked at the Biron lab, Gross said, workers often took the company bus to Rapids to stand in line at the Daly drug, jewelry and liquor store. It was payday, the banks were closed, and they wanted to cash their checks.

Later, watchmaker license in hand, Gross left Johnson Hill's and went to Daly's, an east side riverbank landmark, where he operated the jewelry department for three years.

Speaking in 2002, he recalled a Christmas contest in which a small black-and-white television was to be the prize. When he left on a Friday night to go home for supper, the store was empty of customers. When he came back, Gross could hardly squeeze behind the counter. There was such a crowd, because everyone had qualified for the prize.

In another promotion, girls, upon high school graduation were allowed to pick out a free silver spoon to begin a

set. The purpose was defeated when one girl chose a pattern and enlisted a flock of other graduates to pick up free spoons to match.

When jeweler Larson left Johnson Hill's, circa 1955, Gross took his place in the jewelry department.

The store was under new management. When owner Ray Johnson considered selling the store, said Gross, accountants Chester Bell and Irving Moberg, "came up here to study the books and get it all organized, so that Johnson would know how much to charge." Instead, said Gross, Bell and Moberg bought the store in 1952.

"Then Bell and Moberg wanted to get their buying power up by buying more stores. They went over to Marshfield and bought two stores there," Gross said. "One on each end of the town. Then they closed one of them. They also affiliated with a store in Beaver Dam. They got wind of a store in Iowa and they were going to buy that, so they sent a guy down to Iowa to pretend he was a shopper, kind of a spy.

"Apparently, he went out at night and had a few snorts and made the mistake of telling people what he was down there for. The word got back to the management and he blew the whole thing."

Gross recalled Rapids' Ridikalas Daze. "In the first few years, it was really good because merchants weren't going out and buying merchandise for it. That was stuff they really wanted to unload, their white elephants."

Johnson Hill's brought out "stuff from the attic. They were selling dresses they

had up there for 35 cents."

Gross recalled fondly that Ed Bredow, a Johnson Hill's clothing salesman, had a reputation for pranks. He hooked up a phone to the men's dressing room and sent customers in to try on a pair of pants. About the time the guy got the pants on, Ed would ring the phone in the dressing room. Then he'd say, "By God, those look good."

"When they built the YMCA, it was John Alexander's pride and joy. They said the room where you first came in was an extension of his house so he could throw parties when it was closed.

"Ed Bredow went down to the Y for the grand opening. He dressed up like a hobo. He even had a small cigar with a toothpick in it. He had whiskers and old ragged clothes. He's sitting there paging through all the magazines and nobody knew who he was so they didn't want to throw him out."

In 1958, Gross sold the Johnson Hill's shop to Bill Johns and went to Florida for six months. He returned to this area via the Denis drug store in Nekoosa, where he operated the jewelry and repair department. After a year, the Daly's jewelry department opened up again and Gross stayed there until he started his own store in 1978.

A couple of years later, on a snowy day in the spring of the year Reagan was elected president, he recalls, the Daly's building was razed, along with the Sugar Bowl, Penney's and the rest of the riverbank block. It was kind of like a big chunk of the '50s tumbled into the river and floated away.

03-09-02

Bo

It was a childhood version of her name: “Isab-bo,” for Isabel Eleanor Fletcher and it seemed to fit.

Three years after Bo’s 1897 birth in Ogden, Utah, her family moved to California. At the University of Wisconsin, she met Thomas Utegaard. They were married in 1918. Soon, Tom was on his way to the field artillery. World War I over, the Utegaards moved to Wisconsin Rapids. Tom had been hired as an engineer with Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co.

Working with company president George W. Mead I and chief engineer William Thiele, Tom designed private and civic projects ranging from a new Rapids dam, the Rapids riverbank wall, an addition to Riverview Hospital, a new airport road and Lake Du Bay.

After Pearl Harbor, Tom volunteered for another round of wartime service. At the time of his 1943 death from cancer, Lt. Commander Utegaard was public works officer at the Navy port of Bayonne, New Jersey.

The Utegaard sons, Tom (Fletcher), John and Rolf, attended Lowell School and Lincoln High School. They lived at 350 1st Ave. S., not far from Rapids Mayor Carl C. Knudsen, who ran a corner gas station across from Sweet’s Grocery.

In 1944, Bo sold the Rapids house and moved to San Francisco but returned here in a year with Rolf, the only son still at home.

Outspoken mayor Knudsen remarked, “I think the council must realize that the

present mayor has worked for four years for a token payment.” In public service, he said, he had been “compelled to attend banquets and weddings and buy presents,” all at his expense. “If you expect the same kind of service you have been getting you can’t expect to get it under the wage you have been paying.”

After the 1952 election, for the first time, the position of mayor would become full-time at an annual salary of \$5,000.

Two weeks after the council action, Juneau County native, WWI vet and salesman, Leon F. Kimberly, 54, announced he would enter the race, hoping to “develop a sound forward-looking program so that the city can progress in all directions” and “create a spirit of harmony.”

In January 1952, three Utegaard sons were in the military. Tom in the Navy, John with the Marines in Korea, and Rolf in the Army, en route to Korea, so Bo was alone in a lower apartment at 511 3rd St. S. when she became the first woman candidate for mayor in Wisconsin Rapids history.

Her spirit is displayed in two anecdotes related by Bo’s son, Rolf Utegaard, Winter Park, Fla.

In their early married years, Bo’s husband Tom had enjoyed “the odd cocktail” but Bo had chosen not to drink: until the government decided to tell her she couldn’t. Prohibition provoked her to take a drink whenever she felt like it.

At the time the Utegaards moved to Rapids, Bo enjoyed riding horses but there wasn’t a riding stable, said Rolf.

Somebody advised her to try the National Guard armory, where a horse-drawn artillery unit kept horses available for exercise, which she did.

Bo was warned, “This one’s pretty touchy.” But she insisted. “I’ll ride it.” The horse threw her and the two walked back separately. “Saddle it up again,” she ordered and established who was in charge. In the end, her son said, Bo was allowed to ride the battery commander’s horse.

More conventional experience included: two terms on the Rapids school board; chairmanship of the South Wood County Red Cross unit and the TB Christmas seal sale; and activity in parent-teacher groups.

Taking her cue from previously announced candidate Kimberly, Bo said, “I think we all agree that more can be accomplished if there is harmony and good teamwork in civic affairs than if there is constant disagreement.” She emphasized the “progressive” history of the community, a nod to her friend and former mayor, George W. Mead, who had not hesitated to use public and Consolidated resources for what he considered worthwhile projects.

But the March 4 *Tribune* reported harsh words at the Water and Light Commission meeting between Mayor Knudsen and W.F. Thiele, commission president. Thiele was a friend of Mead and of the Utegaards.

Thiele: “At the last Council meeting the mayor made disparaging remarks about the number of men we have working here. I’d like those slurring remarks

from the chair stopped.”

Knudsen: “They’ll never be stopped until things are changed around here.”

Thiele: “Then I’d like to have the mayor tell us how to run this outfit.”

Knudsen: “Things are all right as long as we go along with you. But the minute I come out with a suggestion it’s a slur.”

Knudsen: “Do you fellows want to work or fight all the time?”

Thiele: “That’s up to you.”

Knudsen: “No, it’s up to you. I’ll work with you fellows if you want to cooperate. Otherwise I’ll fight you.”

Commissioner R.J. Lawless attempted to calm the discussion, complaining, “Every month we go through the same thing.”

At the Wisconsin Rapids Business and Professional Women’s Club, Bo asked, “Does it seem logical to you that when it is admitted even by the mayor that our city does need a new bridge, a new west-side school and a new swimming pool, that in a prosperous year our city tax, which is the main source of money for any city improvements, should be reduced?”

The two outstanding civic improvements under Knudsen were the Hotel Mead and the new Howe School, she said, both accomplished “in spite of the mayor doing everything he could to block them.”

“With the money already on hand and earmarked for replacing that school, the present mayor attempted in every way to block the construction of safer quarters ... perfectly willing to have these

hundreds of little folks laid open to this daily risk.”

To the *Tribune*, Knudsen said he would let the record of his past four years stand as a platform in his bid for re-election. “Fidelity in government will be continued and ... a long-range, business-like program will be carried out in the future the same as it has in the past.” In person, Knudsen’s immigrant’s voice urged, “Vee pay as vee go.”

The mayor, 69, was born in Denmark. At the age of 21, he arrived in this country and got a job in an Iowa blacksmith shop. In 1912, Knudsen arrived in Rapids to work for a construction firm. Two years later, he started his own dredging company. For about 15 years, his firm drained swamps in Minnesota while he maintained a residence here for his wife and two sons.

In 1928, Knudsen opened a gas station and operated it until 1939 when he retired.

He entered municipal politics in 1946 as alderman from the 8th Ward. He was elected mayor in 1948 and re-elected to that office two years later.

Two controversies developed during Knudsen’s two terms, according to the *Tribune*: The “wrangle” over the new Howe School in which Knudsen resisted additional borrowing, the result being that a planned gymnasium was not built. And the “squabble” over the financial condition of the water and light departments that spurred him to run for mayor in the first place.

On the eve of the election, Bo wound up her campaign before the Rotary Club

at the Hotel Mead. “We might compare our council or city government to an orchestra and the mayor as its conductor. The duties of the conductor should be principally devoted to coordinating the efforts of the various musicians. He would produce nothing but bedlam if he considered that this duty was not only to conduct the orchestra but also to play most of the instruments himself, regardless of the talents of the individual musician.”

She said she did not believe “safe and healthful schools, real consideration of the youth of our community and the inexpensive encouragement of sports for young and old were luxuries.”

By a vote of 3,448-1,779, Knudsen carried all but the 3rd Ward. Candidate Kimberly did not appear in the results.

Knudsen’s statement suggested he thought wealth and power were behind the opposition to him. “I have campaigned very little, no money has been spent on my behalf.

“It was a great honor to me that the Central Labor Union and Local 94, Pulp, Sulphite & Paper Mill workers, without my request, endorsed my candidacy for mayor. Your action today has shown the state of Wisconsin that the mayor’s chair in Wisconsin Rapids cannot be bought and that you do not want a mayor whose office, in my opinion, would be run by remote control.”

04-13-02

Bad Boys

Frat rats, fools and boobs: thousands of college-age males bulging with histamines, hormones and hijinks, bent on mass mischief.

Panty raid!

At the University of Wisconsin, a “howling mob” of 1,000 parade down Langdon Street and break into at least seven women’s dormitories. Some of the “screeching coeds” are “egging the raiders on.” At Lawrence College, Appleton, females who try to invade a male dormitory fail to rip off any underwear. Instead, several females are deposited in the adjacent Fox River.

By May 22, according to the *Tribune*, panty raids have broken out at more than 40 schools, often escalating to battles between egg-hurling mobs and tear gas wielding cops.

A *Tribune* editorial deplores the “silly season of the campus cup-ups. There are a lot of young fellows in Korea who would welcome the educational opportunities which some of their civilian counterparts hold so lightly as to jeopardize though these crazy antics. Maybe the college boys could get their fill of excitement by trading places with the battle-weary GI’s for awhile.

A Madison grandmother says that, in 1902, she had seen young males pouring into Chadbourne Hall in search of feminine undergarments. Fifty years earlier.

Funeral services were held at Tigerton for a former principal of Biron Grade School most recently a teacher at Longview, Wash. He had been bayoneted

near Longview by a hitch-hiking Marine because of “improper advances.” The deceased, who had been Biron principal 1917-18 and 1919-21, had been convicted in Dane county for making improper advances to a sailor and sentenced to the Wisconsin state prison at Waupun. He also had similar convictions in the state of Oregon.

Fifty years ago.

Right here in River City, two hot-rodders were observed by city police officer Charles Kirchner, racing west on Grand Avenue about 10:30 p.m. After he stopped the lead car, Kirchner “took after” the second car which had reversed sharply and was speeding back toward the center of the city.

Siren blowing and red light flashing, Kirchner’s squad car caught up with the second hot-rod in the 1700 block of West Grand Avenue, when the pursued party turned suddenly in front of Kirchner’s squad and the two collided. Damage came to \$50.

Fifty years ago. Why did youngsters act up?

Dr. Jay B. Nash, professor of education at New York University, said maybe because they spent 30 minutes more per week at the TV screen than they spent in school. “They should be solving problems, modeling in clay, making things at a work bench, experimenting in chemistry, throwing a ball, playing a trombone, skinning a squirrel.”

Fifty years ago, adults had an idea how to get the kids away from the TV. Send them to movies. Showing at the Wisconsin theater was radio’s favorite

family in their first great screen comedy: Ozzie and Harriet, David and Ricky, in “Here Come the Nelsons.”

Construction had begun to double the seating capacity of the Rapids Theater, 220 E. Grand Ave. Tom Poulos, president and general manager, announced that the enlarged theater’s capacity would be 627. The building would have a “three-dimensional” screen and new air conditioning.

The “Rapids” would find new competition in the Highway 13 drive-in theater, also under construction, according to John Anoszek, manager of the Wisconsin and Palace theaters. There would be accommodation for about 450 cars near the intersection of Highways 13 and 73, south of the city (commonly known as Smoky Joe’s Corners).

Already operating was Hi-way 51 outdoor theater at “Coopers Corners,” between Plover and Stevens Point.

Fortunately, there were some clean-cut kids 50 years ago, such as Lincoln high’s Dave VanWormer, whose photo appeared on the sports page, warming up for a track meet at the Fieldhouse. He was “the chief hope” of coach J.A. Torresani for a win in the mile run at the 19th annual Rapids Invitational meet.

Later, at the Wisconsin Valley Indoor Track meet, Rapids defended its three-year championship with a combined point total that exceeded that of the four other schools combined.

Young VanWormer, an angler, no doubt appreciated the efforts of the Heart of Wisconsin Conservation League. Over 5,000 legal-sized trout had been re-

leased recently in streams: browns in the Ten Mile; brooks in Bloody Run, Five Mile and Lynn Creeks; and rainbows in the Four Mile, where they could move into 15-year-old Lake Wazeecha.

Fifty years ago, state Sen. Melvin R. Laird, 30, announced he would be a candidate for Republican nomination for Congress in the 7th district. The office had been vacated by the death of Rep. Reid F. Murray.

When Laird had been elected to the state Senate to succeed his late father, M.R. Laird Sr., he became the youngest legislator in the country.

Lucky for young Mel, he wasn't present when five congressmen joined troops at Yucca Flat, Nev., to watch an atom bomb explode. After the terrific flash of light and heat had passed over them, the troops joked, jumped up and laughed, only to gag as the blast drove a wave of dust into their open mouths.

Fifty years ago, in the year of the Cold War, Robert M. Kingdon, Wisconsin Rapids, was spending a year doing post-graduate work at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, under a fellowship awarded by Rotary International. He wrote back to the *Tribune* in a series of articles.

"Twice this month I crossed the Iron Curtain. It happened both times in occupied Berlin, from the West one to the East..."

Fifty years ago, anthrax, one of the dread animal diseases that also affect man, broke out in scattered areas over Wisconsin as the south United States experienced its worst outbreak in history.

Anthrax had appeared in dairy cattle, mink and hogs. Horses, deer, buffalo, guinea pigs and mice also were susceptible. Resident in the soil for many years, anthrax was considered a natural agent.

Local politics update: her energetic campaign was perhaps the most active ever staged here in a mayoral contest, commented the *Daily Tribune*.

Isabel "Bo" Utegaard, subject of last month's *Memoirs*.

An April 2 *Tribune* editorial considered the re-election of Carl C. Knudsen by a 2-1 margin substantial endorsement of his "pay-as-we-go" policy. The *Tribune* congratulated Mrs. Utegaard for courageously speaking her views and said it was "somewhat less than gracious" for Knudsen to infer that his opponent tried to "buy" her way into office through use of various media.

"Mayor Knudsen had his record to stand on; his opponent had to start from scratch in her bid for the voters' support."

Rolf Utegaard reports that when the results were tallied, his mother congratulated Knudsen, who said, "You shouldn't have been in the election in the first place."

Fifty years ago, a new 95-plot subdivision, to be known as the "The Meadows," was surveyed and platted by Mead-Witter Properties on part of the old Witter farm south of Mead Street and east of a proposed extension of Hill Street. Frank Henry's Economy Lumber Supply had options on 32 lots and planned to erect 20 homes before year's end, beginning at Chestnut Street and

the extension of Hill Street. All the new houses would be contemporary or ranch style, one story in height.

Fifty years ago, work began on razing the old S.S. Peter & Paul Catholic church on 2nd Street North. It had served as mother church of the area from 1873, rendered obsolete by a new edifice built in 1952. So it happened that down went the towering steeple of the familiar landmark that would be a crucial item in the dating of old photos.

Obits:

Rev. Alpheus W. Triggs, 73, former pastor of the Rapids First Methodists, 1936-48, and then minister to Port Edwards' Community Church. Services to be held at First Congregational because of its large auditorium.

The Kansas native and Lawrence College graduate was active in numerous civic groups including the WWII Wood County draft board, Wisconsin Rapids library board and Mayor's Committee on Human Rights. He was a veteran of the Spanish-American war.

"One of his greatest joys was to meet and chat with his friends whether on the street during his busy daily rounds or at a meeting of the Rotary Club or some other gathering."

The *Tribune* had detected in Triggs a rare sense of humor. His sermons seldom lacked a story or two designed to make his listeners smile or laugh. He often said that a long face was not the mark of a true Christian. Indeed, Rev. Triggs must have had a funny bone; he baptized me.

05-11-02

Blackjack

Via email courtesy Norm Arendt, Middleton, Wis. To rate your recall of these cultural artifacts, count only those you actually remember, not those you were told about.

Blackjack chewing gum

Licorice flavor, nickel for a pack of five dusty sticks. Located by me at 3rd Street grocery, about half-way downtown from my Two Mile Avenue home.

Blackjack was introduced in the 1800s by the Adams Company as one of the first mass-produced flavored gums. Warner-Lambert bought Adams and halted production of Blackjack in 1976, reviving it temporarily in 1986 as part of a "Nostalgia Gum Program." Warner-Lambert was bought out by Pfizer Co., makers of prescription drugs that include Viagra.

Wax bottles

Miniature Coke-shaped bottles, filled with colored sugar water. Nip the top, sip the "pop." Or chew the entire bottle like gum. In a couple seconds: a tasteless wad of wax. If you're frugal, keep chewing anyway.

Candy cigarettes

Something about the red-tipped sticks felt good to have and hold. And a pack, even better, like the real thing.

The taste? Somewhere between sugar and chalk. Didn't taste any better if you lit them.

Soda pop bottle machines

Clank. Nickel through metal slot and into coin box. Clink. Seven-ounce cola jerked out, glass on glass. Clack.

Remaining bottles clatter into place. Clonk. Snap. Pried-off cap into the box below: snap. Fizz. Glug. Empty bottle into wooden case. Clunk.

Well into the 1980s, *Daily Tribune* owner Bill Huffman Jr. kept his staff happy with a machine offering 12-ounce bottles of Mountain Dew for 15 cents, contributing to a generation of AARP-card Dew-heads.

Coffee shop jukeboxes

Coffee shops? Let's call them soda fountains. Jukeboxes? Small "boxes" on the wall. Flip the cards with a lever to view selections. A nickel for a song or a quarter for six. Sugar Bowl. Friendly Fountain. Art's. Wilpolt's.

Home milk delivery

Through a door on the breezeway side, a Fischer's Dairy milk man set quart bottles in the "milk chute." The unlockable passageway provided a handy entrance to the house when keys weren't available. Cream rose to the bottle top.

In the 1980s, I talked to Bruce Fischer about how his dairy at 240 4th Ave. S. was displaced for Rapids Mall.

Now, in order to determine whether "Fischer" had a "c" in it, I made an Internet search. The first entry displayed was "River City Memoirs" by Dave Engel, as indexed by Marlys Steckler and available at the McMillan Memorial Library Web site. That's bad, when the so-called expert source turns out to be one's self.

Party lines

"Number please."

"2294-J."

"Hello." Our number.

At other houses, such as my grandparents', all the phones on the "line" would ring at the same time. You answered to a signal, such as two longs and a short. Or, for fun, you answered everyone's calls and listened in.

On my own party line, used until recently [pub. 2002], you dialed in private but might pick up the phone and hear your neighbor talking.

Telephone number with a word prefix

"Harrison 3-7200."

Now, it's 423-7200.

Call this number in the afternoon and ask for "the Big Kahuna." It will be well worth the effort. Do it today. You won't get many more chances. [No more chances.]

Newsreels

Any excuse to be in the theater looking at the big screen. Views of Korean War and McCarthy hearings.

PF Flyers

Canvas "sneakers?" Never called them sneakers.

"Tennies."

Red Ball Jets.

Butch wax

Brylcreem. "A little dab'll do ya. Ya look so debonair."

Butch haircuts. Crew cut. Shaved short all around. Admiration for "flat-tops" like George Zimmerman's. Like the landing deck of an aircraft carrier.

Couldn't get a proper deck because my dad was cutting my hair and because my head was shaped like that of Garry Moore, the radio and television personality. Garry Moore promoted Winston cigarettes and smoked them frequently.

He died of emphysema in 1993. Garry Moore had a secret; his real name was J. Garrison Morfit.

Peashooters

Bamboo, plastic or metal tubes. Actual dried peas for ammo. Ow!

Howdy Doody

Never liked the freckled little nerd. Met Howdy's alter ego, Buffalo Bob Smith, in 1970, peddling already nostalgic shtick to college students. "Say, kids, what time is it?"

45 rpm records

At Your Record Shop, you could try out the 98-cent two-song "records" on available turntables.

I bought classmate Al Rasmussen's collection of used "45s" for \$10, including a record box which I still have and a 45 rpm "record player." If you turned it up as far as it would go...

Just let me hear some of that rock and roll music!

S&H Green Stamps

Gas stations with glass cases displaying tumblers, cups and plates for free or at a reduced price with Green Stamps.

"Fill 'er up." More likely, "dollar's worth."

Hi-Fis

"High-fidelity" record players and 33 rpm "record albums." Hi-Fi became "stereo."

Excited about my first stereo outfit (with then-new detachable speakers), purchased at the Merchandise Center, 3970 8th St. S. Recently, I spoke with the guy who owned the Merchandise Center then. But I can't remember his name.

Metal ice trays with levers

That painful cracking if you didn't hold them under the water long enough.

Mimeograph paper

Two Mile school: Before classes, one of four women teachers cranking the handle, mimeograph machine clicking away. Remember those stencils you had to type first? Smell of the ink?

Blue flashbulbs

First camera used, Mom's old box. First new camera, a Kodak "Starmite." Just after the big flash-bulbs and just before flashcubes.

Beanie and Cecil

Say what?

Roller skate keys

Round and round in the unfinished basement, smacking into columns, falling on concrete floor, scraping elbows, having fun. Steel wheels, ball bearings. Skates attached to shoes. "I've got a brand new pair of roller skates and you've got a brand new key."

Cork popgun

One of those moments you remember for no good reason: on the stairway of the Clarence Riemer house on Rapids' West Side, firing a workable cork "rifle" for the first time. Later, my own cork gun with the nice wooden stock. Pop!

One sunny day circa 1957, on an NRA gun safety course field trip to Friendship mound, Pee Wee Peckham shared his 7-Up candy bar with me. You aren't around to hear it, Pee Wee, but thanks. Some things we don't forget.

Drive-ins

Mentioned here recently: our own Highway 13 "outdoor," built 50 years

ago. Or does "drive-in" refer to root beer stands? We had a lot of good ones.

Studebakers

The little car that seemed to have been built backwards.

Wash tub wringers

Turn a handle and squeeze clothes between rollers, then hang 'em on the line. Not that I ever used such a thing but they were around, many on front porches.

How to score

If you remembered 0-5 of the above, you're "still young," 6-10, getting older, 11-15, don't tell; 16-25, "older than dirt."

LHS classmate Rob Gringle, in Washington D.C. recalled that at least two of the candy cigarettes in a pack were bound to be broken. He added to the list, bubble gum cigars, Clove gum, fuzzies, dots of candy on paper strips, Red Rock Cola and Herschleb's lemon brickle ice cream.

Red Rock Cola? I remember Royal Crown Cola. Good, and cheaper.

"All of the above, with the exception of Clove gum, the occasional Fudgesicle & Herschleb's strictly verboten at home," Rob said. "All available though at Peters Grocery on Baker Street, an easy bike ride."

My quiz score? Only missed one and that was "Beanie and Cecil," which shouldn't be in this quiz. I think it was a television show. We didn't even own a TV set 50 years ago.

06-08-02

Big Kahuna

Why be a writer if you can't honor your friends? Especially now that one of the best has cleaned out his drawers and headed out to hang a gnarly ten.

The first time I laid eyes on the Big Kahuna was during my virgin visit to the *Daily Tribune*. In early 1980, I needed a job and the *Tribune* wanted verbiage for the "Seventies" section.

After apologizing for the pay scale (you mean for twelve months!?), *Tribune* editor Joe Karius introduced me to the stalwarts of South Wood County print journalism. Remember reporters Vern Borth, John Pelton, Anna Marie Lux and Claude Werder? Scope editor and obit writer Debra Brehmer? Community Life editor Diane Montz? Sports editor Dave VanWormer and his sidekick, Ken Kleppe? Photographers Craig Felts and Mel Glodowski? Most important, city editor Robert Des Jarlais?

"I saw the story about you," I said to Des Jarlais that day.

Editor Karius had described his second-in-command as a poker-faced poker player. "It was a slow news day," Bob, later dubbed the Big Kahuna, said. In the same droll manner, he soon gave me my first encouragement as a newspaper guy. "Rose Mary said she thinks you're a good writer...different."

For his part, Karius asked, "Do you have a camera?" Because I did, I was instantly a professional photographer.

An assignment soon took me to the Des Jarlais residence, where Bob made

sure I met Rose Mary, and their children, Renee, Julie, Amy and Andy.

If the *Tribune* were also a family (and so it seemed during the ownership of William F. Huffman, Jr., whose father had preceded him as publisher), Bob was at the center of it. Watching him pitching softball at a company picnic, I didn't realize that, some fifty years ago, Bob fell from a silo at his family's farm near Green Bay and broke his leg. If the resulting shorter limb was a problem, he kept a poker face about it.

Shortly after I started at the *Tribune*, Karius left for the sports editorship of the Milwaukee *Sentinel* and Bob became interim editor here. After an abbreviated stint by an irrational optimist, Bob was named official editor. This made him, in surfer-patois, the Big Kahuna.

When the *Tribune* was sold to the Thomson newspaper chain, Mr. K had to deal with the resulting economics, ergonomics, different comics, astral phonics, fluxomics and Reaganomics. Most nights, a light burned in his office long after he should have gone home.

But he kept a poker face.

That's what I tried to do when he, as the Big Kahuna, said to me, the photographer, "Could you swing by and get a shot of...?"

Was he bluffing? Or did I really have to "swing by" and shoot the duck in the mailbox, then swing by and process the film, then swing by and print a snapshot for the next day's edition? It would delay my weekend by two hours.

Still employing his poker face, Mr. K helped a school of young journalists

working their way up the editorial slipstream, with names such as Pete, Tom and Jamie. His doctrine was simple. "Put out the best paper possible."

After he stepped down in 1985 or so as "the" editor, he remained "an" editor-at-large. For many years, I'm glad to say, my work received his scrutiny.

Mr. K was also a writer, through columns such as "Rapids Pulse." In one engaging sequence, references to his boyhood residence of Lena, Wis., inspired ongoing responses.

Outside the Trib, Mr. K has been my fellow researcher, delving into back hall files at the Superior courthouse, tracking down Old Reuben's nephew at Portage and interviewing Bob Dylan's former drummer in Hibbing, Minn.

A Neil Diamond aficionado, Bob kept a poker face about Dylan and, at a Milwaukee concert, made a determined but unsuccessful attempt to get a backstage pass. Because of his name, Bob, and the many ties to my Dylan biography, at the age of two, my daughter thought Mr. K actually was Bob Dylan.

"You're a couple of adventurous boys," his mother told us as we arrived at her Douglas, Ariz., home. Stretches the definition of boys. But yes, we had been to Truth or Consequences, Metropolis, Prentice, Winneconne, the rock 'n' roll reunion at the El Paso Club, an awards banquet in downtown Duluth, Woody's biggest burger bar in Pratt, Kansas. All in search of the perfect Southern Comfort Old Fashioned "sweet with an olive," not a cherry. And, for Mr. K, trying to solve this: If I only eat five sausages,

three eggs, an order of hash browns and a couple of pancakes, why can't I lose a few pounds?

While on the road, he often visited an old friend, of which there were many. In Houghton, Mich., a newspaper publisher formerly with the *Daily Tribune*; in Oshkosh, a newspaper executive; in a New Mexico, a former Rapids resident who continued to correspond.

As he was faithful to his family and friends, so was Bob attentive to his faith. Every Sunday, he attended mass, while I wandered around such exotic terrain as Socorro, New Mexico, or Ashland, Wis. At home, he provided support and council to St. Vincent Catholic parish and his friend, the local reverend.

Mr. K can converse with anyone about anything. Basketball with poet t. kilgore splake, journalism with author Norbert Blei, abstract painting with heiress Mary Burns, folk blues with guru Dave Morton. No one is more ready to buy a drink or over-tip a waitress. Beginning a road trip, the bill has been paid before I get to the cashier. When Central Home Improvements, Inc. of Rapids finished roofing his house, Mr. Kahuna chased all over town with a car full of rapidly-melting Herschleb's sundaes, to find and reward the workers.

He did me a favor when a Hibbing native asked him, "Are you a Bob Dylan fan?" And he answered, "I'm a Dave Engel fan."

He said it with a poker face.

Thanks, Mr. Kahuna.

Remember Joe Karius? Apparently now publisher of the *Daily Globe* news-

paper, Ironwood, Mich., he sent a letter to the *Daily Tribune* following Mr. K's retirement notice.

"Early in his *Tribune* career as sports editor, Bob worked long and hard to provide outstanding coverage of local and area sports. Later, working in general news he honed his already strong editing skills. Most impressive, though, was his commitment and dedication to newspapers and good journalism. At the same time his professional and polite demeanor earned him the respect of colleagues and news sources. You're right – he will be missed."

When Bob Des Jarlais fell off a silo fifty years ago, a lot of us were trying to injure ourselves over the 4th of July.

Yet, according to the *Tribune* of 1952, we all failed. There was not a single accident, traffic or otherwise, to report after a "safe and sane" holiday weekend.

This, despite a crowd of 5,000 jammed into Witter Athletic Field Friday night for the giant fireworks display that climaxed the celebration sponsored by Buckley-Baldwin Post No. 2534, Veterans of Foreign Wars. Carnival attractions and games and contests for children drew large numbers to the field during the day and evening.

Over 1,500 witnessed the State League baseball game between Wisconsin Rapids and Wausau and thousands more attended stock car races at Crowns Speedway in the afternoon. Lake Wazeecha and other parks were "thronged by" picnickers, boaters and swimmers.

The annual Wood County Board picnic, held at "North County park," was

highlighted by a softball game, called because of the heat. Not content with their efforts in the game, the supervisors competed in a sprint race in which Dick Greenway of Sherry emerged victor.

A crowd of 700 had attended the picnic, the children participating in sack races and pie eating contests and the women in nail driving contests.

Fifty years ago, a war was still going on. Pfc. John R. Wulf, 23, Port Edwards, was killed in action in Korea, June 21.

Wulf entered service January 8, 1951. Prior to induction into the Army, he was employed by Nekoosa-Edwards paper Co.

Pfc. Wulf was survived by his wife, the former Violet Schauer of Wisconsin Rapids, a 9-months-old daughter, and his parents in Oregon and Kansas.

Fifty years ago, funeral services were held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church for Pfc. Neal W. Haferman, 20, son of Mr. and Mrs. William T. Haferman, 11th Ave. N. He had been killed in action, July 29, 1950.

Pfc. Haferman was born in Wisconsin Rapids, March 30, 1930. He attended West Side Lutheran and graduated from Lincoln High school in 1948.

Prior to enlisting in the army in January, 1949, he had been employed by the Water & Light Department.

He was survived by his parents and three brothers, all of Wisconsin Rapids.

Had he lived to see this July morning in 2002, Neal Haferman would be 72 years of age.

07-13-02

Cad Bates

One person had all the clues. But the rest of us didn't even know who that person was. We had to put the puzzle together one piece at a time.

So it was that Wood County sheriff Arthur Boll picked up the phone on a Monday night fifty years ago, and told what he knew to district attorney John M. Potter, who was waiting at the old county jail for a meeting of the Wood County Sheriff and Traffic Committee.

And so it was that, in turn, the people of River City were provided one piece at a time, from the source that has always told them the most, their local newspaper.

From the *Daily Tribune* of July 1, 1952:

At 6 p.m. Monday night, June 30, the body of Clara "Cad" Bates, 76...

Found in living quarters attached to Cad's Tavern, a beer bar she operated seven miles east of Wisconsin Rapids and a mile north of Kellner on the Portage County line. The victim, who lived alone, found lying on a bed, unclothed except for shoes and stockings. Skull crushed by repeated blows from a blunt instrument, said coroner Dr. Harold Pomainville. Tight around her neck, twine of shoestring and wrapping cord, covered by a blood-soaked towel.

Puzzle pieces seemed to fall into place. For example, death was believed to have occurred after 11 p.m. Sunday, when Cad closed the tavern. And, it seemed, forced entry made by the mur-

derer. A rear screen door cut by a sharp instrument and a wire pushed through to lift the latch. The hasp on the outer door, secured by a padlock, torn loose.

Some pieces were harder to find, notably the murder weapon.

A criminal pathologist, called in from La Crosse to perform an autopsy, termed the beating "highly unusual." The victim's forehead crushed as if from a blunt instrument, yet other gashes on the head made by a sharp edge.

Authorities advanced no motive for the murder. Robbery was ruled out. The tavern till was untouched and jewelry on the victim had not been removed. Boll declared the act, "a brutal thing, probably the work of a sadist."

Edward Kanieski, 11th St. S., and Alvin Phipps, Rt. 1, who lived a quarter-mile north of the tavern, had discovered the body at about 6 p.m. Monday, the day prior to the newspaper story.

Kanieski said he had been driving past the tavern on County Trunk U with his wife and child and decided to stop for a beer. He found the tavern door locked, he said, and walked to the rear, where he heard noises inside that sounded "like a woman or child weeping."

Puzzled, Kanieski said, he drove to Phipps' home and returned with Phipps. Entering by way of the open rear door, they found the victim's body in a bedroom. Kanieski called Sheriff Boll on the Bates' house telephone.

Boll and undersheriff Tom Forsyth went to the scene. According to the sheriff, noises Kanieski mentioned would seem to have been made by two dogs.

The crime scene was roped off and the state crime laboratory Madison called in from Madison. Two guards were posted overnight while Boll and Potter continued to question acquaintances of the victim. An "inch-by-inch" search was conducted by Al Hamann, state crime laboratory technician, said the *Tribune*.

Miss Clara "Cad" Bates:

Had operated the town of Grand Rapids tavern for five years.

Was born in Burlington, Iowa, Dec. 27, 1875, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Eli Bates.

Had lived in the Rapids area for about 40 years. Was survived by one brother, William Bates, Wisconsin Rapids, a sister, Mrs. Grace McDonald, Burlington, one niece and three nephews.

Funeral services were held at Krohn & Berard Funeral Home, Rev. C.A. O'Neill officiating, burial to take place in Burlington.

Wednesday, July 2, *Tribune*:

No new puzzle pieces, said Boll. He and Potter had questioned several persons and narrowed down the field of those who might have committed the act. "What we are trying to do now," the sheriff said, "is to locate the persons who last saw Miss Bates prior to her death."

Investigation seemed to show that the tavern had been open up to 2 p.m. Sunday but that it had been locked up by 3 p.m. when friends of the victim stopped by. "That leads us to believe that the murder may have been committed Sunday afternoon," Boll said. "We have the descriptions of four autos seen parked in front of the tavern at 2 p.m."

“We would like the people in the tavern at that time, especially, to come forward with any information they have.”

A thorough search for a murder weapon was made by the sheriff’s department with the aid of 15 men from Battery C, 126th Field Artillery Battalion, a local National guard unit. No weapon was found.

Thursday, July 3, *Tribune*:

As the search for the murderer moved into its fourth day, a “John Doe” hearing was called by Potter, to be conducted before justice of the peace Gerald W. Hierl to obtain testimony from key witnesses under oath. Meanwhile, the puzzle that had been framed was jumbled again.

It was learned from a preliminary autopsy report that the victim was killed Saturday night or Sunday morning NOT late Sunday as was believed.

It was learned that cars seen parked in the area on Sunday were owned by persons picking blueberries NOT by those frequenting Cad’s tavern. No one was found who had been at the tavern on Sunday.

Furthermore, Clara Bates was in Wisconsin Rapids most of Saturday morning but the latest anyone had seen her alive was Saturday not Sunday.

Saturday, July 5, *Tribune*:

Based on information that came incidentally to the sheriff’s attention while investigating the Bates murder, a charge of statutory rape of a 10-year-old town of Grand Rapids girl was brought against Edward F. Kanieski, the same person who had called to report finding the body of Cad Bates. A preliminary hear-

ing was set for July 14 and Kanieski, in lieu of \$5,000 bond, was committed to the county jail.

Police said Kanieski, born July 15, 1918, had a criminal record dating at least to 1933. His most recent conviction was Jan. 25, 1950, when he was sentenced by County Judge Byron B. Conway to one-to-two years at Wau-pun State Prison for attempted breaking and entering at the home of Mrs. Louise Eberius, 76, town of Saratoga, in the early morning of Sept. 12, 1949.

Mrs. Eberius, who lived alone, shot Kanieski in the neck after he cut telephone wires and forced open a screen door opening onto the front porch, according to the *Tribune*.

Sheriff Boll said the only recent development in the Bates case was the discovery that a cigar box containing about \$40, all in dimes bearing the picture of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt, was missing from the victim’s home. Relatives said Miss Bates was a collector of that particular coin.

Monday, July 7, *Tribune*:

County authorities revealed they found a small, weighted, leather-bound blackjack, hidden in a woodpile near Cad’s Tavern. Sheriff Boll said, “If inexpertly used, it could inflict the type of head wounds that caused the victim’s death.” Police were also looking for a .25 caliber pistol Bates had in her possession. “We now know Miss Bates died sometime after 12:30 a.m. Sunday,” Boll said, “since we have confirmed that she had kept the tavern open up to that time.”

Kanieski, meanwhile, was taken to Madison for a lie-detector test, the results of which were not released. A search warrant enabled authorities to search his home, but the sheriff did not disclose what had been found.

Wednesday, July 9, *Tribune*: Another search of the area near Cad’s Tavern was made with a mine detector loaned by the Stevens Point National Guard. The only result was a rusted jackknife.

Of possible relevance to the Bates case was the ongoing three-way race for Republican nomination for sheriff among Boll, Arthur E. Berg, Wisconsin Rapids and Albert J. Specht, Marshfield.

The winner would face William Obermeier, town of Rudolph, the only Democratic candidate.

Thursday, July 10, *Tribune*:

The autopsy report in the Bates murder case was received by county coroner Pomainville but the contents were not divulged.

The knife found Tuesday afternoon was sent to the state crime laboratory.

Tuesday, July 15, *Tribune*:

Kanieski was bound over to Circuit Court to stand trial on the abuse charge. Bond of \$5,000 was continued and he was committed to the county jail.

These are the pieces of the puzzle available to the public in the case of Cad Bates.

Nothing more of importance to the Cad Bates case was reported as of August 10, 1952.

Fifty years ago, today.

08-10-02

Too Many Daves

David Engel, Dave the Engel, Dave the Buns of Engels, Dave the big rib cage Engel...

An Internet search tells me what I already knew: too many Dave Engels. A "senior research scientist." A "popular mixologist." A Saugatuck fisherman. An organic farmer in Viroqua. A concerned citizen. A gun shop owner. A webmaster.

Dave Engel: one of three founders of the Portsmouth New Hampshire Yankee Clipper Barber Shop Chorus. Treasurer of the Central Ohio Chevelle Owners. Yes, my 1967 Chevelle Malibu 283 ran for 160,000 trouble-free miles. In the pit crew of Jim Bavuso (who got his start helping Dave Miller according to an article by Dave Dragovich).

For a while, I got those phone calls. "Dave Engel?"

"This is the real Dave. I think you want the one that works for Georgia Pacific."

"Dave Engle does not like to risk disrupting his hitters' concentration by giving them advice during games." Ralph David Engle, born 1956, apparently is or was the New York Mets baseball hitting coach. His highest salary was \$215,000, pretty close to my average at the *Daily Tribune*, writing stories about local history.

When Daves are born, they are called "David." Dr. Orville Straub, the Rapids dentist, cheerfully dubbed me, "Davy." I loved my Davy Crockett coonskin cap, but hated the name, "Davy."

"David" was a good name for parents who wanted something Biblical that sounded like it came from Sears Roebuck. Also a good name for a short guy, recalling what happened with Goliath. And what was that thing with Bathsheba? "Don't call me King Dave!"

Moving on to "Dah-veed," the Renaissance sculpture by Michelangelo. I was named for it. That's what it says in one of my books.

David in the Fifties: Dwight David Eisenhower, the President. And Dwight David Eisenhower, called David, grandson of the President. Married Julie Nixon.

Henry David Thoreau. John David Chapman. David Nelson, son of Oswald "Ozzie" Nelson. David was the square one. The hepcat was Eric Hilliard "Ricky" Nelson who closed the television show with mild rock-and-roll.

David Niven. Actor. Birth name, James David Graham Niven.

David Ben-Gurion, state of Israel's first prime minister.

David Copperfield, the magician. Birth name, David Kotkin.

David Kaminsky. Stage name, Danny Kaye.

David Bowie. Birth name, David Robert Jones.

David Brinkley. David Duchovny. Hasselhoff. Spade. Lynch. Cohen/Blue. Crosby. Lee Roth.

Berkowitz, arsonist and serial killer, born June 1, 1953. Called himself Son of Sam.

David McCallum: born September 19, 1933, Scotland. Played Illya Kurya-

kin on "The Man From U.N.C.L.E."

David Nordlee, one of the first Davids I knew. Lived across Clyde Avenue from our house, in the late 1940s.

David Murgatroyd. After we moved to Two Mile Avenue, he sometimes allowed me to play with his toy trucks. If any of his pals came by I should scram.

David Keating. I wore Dave's passed-down blue jeans. That's the way we did it then.

David David. David Davidowski. David.com.

Most popular given names:

In 1920, "John," "William," "James," "Robert," "Joseph."

"John" is Number one until 1926, knocked out by "Robert."

In 1935, it's "James" at Number 1, followed by "Robert," "John," "William" and "Richard." This is the year "David" enters the top 10 at Number 10.

From 1937-53, "David" hovers around Number 5 but in 1955 makes a big move, reaching Number 1 in 1960, 1961 and 1963.

It hangs on at Number 2 and Number 3 until 1973 when "David" declines in favor of "Christopher," "Michael" and "Jason."

"David" sees Joshua (fit the battle of Jericho) enter the fray in 1979. By now a journeyman with staying power, "David" hangs on around Number 5 into the late 1980s.

The nineties are disastrous for the timeworn, fatigued "David." In 1992, it is Number 10 with "Michael" (row the boat ashore) at Number 1.

A 1993 tie with Ryan is the last hur-

rah for “David.” The punch-drunk pug is gone from the top-ten in 1994, unable to compete with “Zachary,” “Jacob,” “Tyler,” “Brandon” and “Austin.”

The first half of 2001 shows “Jacob” (climbing Jacob’s ladder) in the Number 1 spot, followed by “Michael,” “Joshua” and “Matthew.” “David” is Number 21.

After my dad, “Don,” died, Mom (“Arline” but called “Sally”) and I were shopping for a coffin.

“You may have seen Dave’s stories in the *Tribune*,” she said to the funeral director, who was quick to respond, “I love your work, Dave.”

As he showed us his wares, the *Tribune* reader recalled “my” humorous rants about too many traffic lights, ramblings about fishing and critiques of the Packers. “That’s Dave Van Wormer,” I said.

Back in the days of Joseph Karius, we journalists had to be known by our official birth-names. But when Robert Kahuna became editor, he brought the surfer mystique into play.

“Can I call myself ‘Dave?’” I asked.

He said, “Go ahead dude,” and changed his name to Bob.

I thought of starting a photo collection of all the “Dave’s Body Shop” signs I have seen.

Have you heard of “Dave’s Falls Park,” Amberg, Wis.? A man recently saved his four children and fiancé but drowned, crossing at Dave’s Falls.

How about “Famous Dave’s Barbecue?” It’s available at Wisconsin Dells (formerly named Kilbourn), among other places.

Or the movie, “Dave?” It seemed like a perfect name for the doofus who became President.

Remember David Obey? He’s been “Dave” for quite a while. I wrote to Dave’s Washington office for a photo of “Dave” in the Fifties but his lackeys did not acknowledge the request. Even after the Dave to Dave talk we once had.

Dave’s predecessor in office was Melvin R. Laird, then of Marshfield. In a talk at the “Hub City” library, I called the former Secretary of Defense, “Hub” and mentioned his mother, Helen Connor Laird. Afterwards, I was unexpectedly presented with: “Helen Laird.” It wasn’t Mel’s mother. It was the wife of his brother, Dave.

David Letterman seems to prefer being called Dave these days. Like Dave Barry.

A cartoon was sent to me: “Dave takes it upon himself to root out the enemy.” Telemarketers’ nite at Dave’s Pub and Dave clubs them as they come in.

Then there are the grandchildren, Vera, Chuck and Dave, from “When I’m 64,” by the Beatles.

Dave Davies of the Kinks rock band.

Dave Dudley. Born May 3, 1928, in Spencer, Wis., Darwin David Pedruska grew up in Stevens Point. His first love was baseball. While recovering from an injury, Dave dropped by WTMT in Wausau, Wis., and ended up a radio host. Fifty years ago, Dave formed the Dave Dudley Trio. His 1963 truck drivin’ song, “Six Days on the Road,” made overdrive sound cool. When Dave was in Point a couple of decades ago, I asked

him if it were true that he used to perform at the Ritz Bar on Main Street.

He said no, but he liked to hang out there. I wish they still called it “The Ritz.”

My pal, Dave Zimmerman, has an older brother named Bob. Bob Dylan, whose real name is Bob Zimmerman, has a younger brother named Dave Zimmerman. When I was writing a book about Bob Dylan, I liked to sign myself “Dave Dylan.”

“Dylan” is the number 16 name in popularity in 2001. I once wrote a song, “My name is Dylan but I don’t know why!”

In high school we were three Daves: Zimmerman, Hanson and myself. Without his approval, Dave Z. was “Zeke.” Dave H.’s nickname, “Mouse,” lasted as long as the peroxide streak in his hair.

“Did I ever tell you that Mrs. McCave/Had twenty-three sons and she named them all Dave?”

I had just finished writing this *Tribune* story when my wife, Kathy, a school librarian, happened upon a distressing footnote.

“I don’t know why I didn’t think of that Dr. Seuss story before,” she said. “It’s even called ‘Too Many Dave’s.’”

A last indignity, in, “The Sneetches and Other Stories,” by Dr. Seuss. It was copyrighted 1961, when the very popular four-letter word was lightweight champion of the world.

09-14-02

America's Fairyland

Seymour, Wis., modern times. Having arrived early for an interview, I need a place to wait. How about the Dairy Queen on Highway 54? So prosperous, an expansion is needed. Even as I watch, a back-hoe chops into the smooth, flat, surface of the late 20th Century. But what it forks out is raw, red clay. Outagamie county clay. Both slippery and sticky, when wet. Hard and stubborn if dry. Even so, more fertile than most. My grandfathers and great-grandfathers had dedicated their working lives to it.

The Seymour Dairy Queen is located on or adjacent to a parcel of land that had been owned by my grandmother's moved-to-town sister, Cleora, and her husband, Winfred Schmidt. Like so many similar plots, their parcel had been subdivided for commuter residences—except for a lot donated to the Methodist church. The gift would later earn “Uncle Winnie” a favorable comparison to Moses in a eulogy from the pastor.

The Seymour Dairy Queen serves the nouveau royals who have converted a bucolic Fifties farm town to a smart bedroom community. It serves the princes and princesses who stand in line waiting for their daily Diet Pepsi and the works.

Almost every time I return from the creeping sprawl of eastern Wisconsin, I think of the same path in the Fifties. Then, with three or four kids stashed around the '49 Pontiac and Fibber McGee and Molly on the radio, we passed

by a rural countryside that, for many of us, is the image of a true Wisconsin. Fifty years ago at sunset, there was a light in the barn.

Light, because Farmer Braun (German equivalent of Brown) had fetched Bessie, Dot and Molly in from pasture (the horse was “Nell”) and now devoted himself to the evening milking. It was comparable to seeing a glow in church windows and knowing someone was inside praying. Fifty years ago, Farmer Braun, Mrs. Braun and the little Brauns did not have the leisure nor liking to clog up the highways looking for fun.

Fast food? Braun was frugal. Extra earnings went back to the farm. Anyway, he preferred his potatoes mashed and chickens beheaded personally. Gambling? A crime against God and good sense. And, it was against the law. Shopping? Farmer Braun had fields to plow, machinery to maintain and fences to mend. He had to fine-tune the clay he would be buried in.

Farmer Braun was a denizen of the Old Millennium. In the New, the countryside is little more than a thoroughfare for five-million maniacs who can't drive 55.

Anyone who cares to look will find there is no light in the barn. The wind blows freely through cracks in the hayloft walls and the nearly shingle-less roof. Before the next thunderstorm strong enough to take the barn down, Farmer Braun's son, who works at a paper mill in Kaukauna and favors the Oneida casino, will move the RV out. Then an ad goes in the shopper: barn

boards for sale.

Remember that quaint Fifties-style license plate? The yellow rectangle? A big slab of dairy product. Cheese. Or, if you prefer, butter. Imprinted “America's Dairyland,” it stood for the hard-working, wholesome, productive land we believed we lived in. That fantasy has melted like the high-priced spread on a hot stove. The Agricultural Technology and Family Farm Institute has determined the number of farms in Wisconsin declined steadily throughout the 20th century. For example, between 1959 and 1997, the number declined from well over 100,000 to less than 25,000. The greatest losses were in the northern third of the state; along the Fox River Valley; and in the counties surrounding the Milwaukee metropolitan area.

Meanwhile, the typical Wisconsin dairy herd quadrupled in size from 15 cows in 1950 to almost 60 in 1999. But the total volume of milk produced dropped along with the value of sales. Apparently, cheese factories have problems getting enough milk to supply their demand.

Our “new” license plate pretty much says it all. Out with the cheese; in with a generic jumble of icons promoting a dreamy playground where Chicago-land refugees can trip lightly among the lilies of the field. The slogan for the New Millennium, sanctioned by the best minds of Wisconsin Dells: “America's Fairyland.”

Like the rest of the state, Wood county has lost a lot of farms. David Long, University of Wisconsin analyst, said

that the 1950 agricultural census showed 2,647 farms in Wood county. The 1997 census counted 968. From 1992-1997, the amount of land in farms decreased while the average size increased from 215 acres to 227 acres.

In 1980, county agricultural agent Louis Rosandick told me the greatest threat to the family dairy farm was an astronomical rise in land value. Ten years previous, a 160-acre farm would have sold for \$28,000. In 1980, the same farm: \$128,000. Agriculture, previously a modest and independent way of life, had become a big business, costing about \$325,000 to finance that 160-acre operation. Most young persons could not contemplate such an investment. Consequently, the total farm population of the state dipped under ten percent.

In August of this year, Rosandick's successor, Tod Planer, retired. The biggest change he had seen, Planer said, was the decline of small farms. Today's farms are larger and more business oriented, Planer said, requiring complex record-keeping. "They've gone from cigar boxes to computers." Planer was troubled by the number of vacant farms in Wood county, victims to the economy of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

"Not many young people today want to go into farming," Planer said. "They see their contemporaries going to work in the city and getting vacations, insurance and other benefits. Not many people want to take on the 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year job."

If, on my way back from the Fox Valley Megalopolis, I took Highway C

from Stevens Point to Rudolph, I would view what has been some lovely and productive farm country. The farmland used to continue on Highway 34 south from Rudolph.

In 1980, as a new *Tribune* correspondent, I interviewed my neighbors, Wendell and Lois Eastling, who were milking forty cows—all made easier, Wendell said, by the technological advances then current. Despite the hard work and daily chores that kept them home almost every day, the Eastlings were happy farming.

Now, 22 years later [2002], I spoke again with Wendell, now 64. In the Fifties, he said, almost every place between Rudolph and Rapids was a farm and there were three small dairies such as their own.

At the time of the 1980 interview, he figured, the township had 12-15 dairy farmers. He can name all of the half-a-dozen that remain. There is just one active dairy farmer on Highway 34 on the Rudolph to Rapids stretch. And that farmer isn't him. Eastling sold the cows and equipment two years ago. He says the place will never be a dairy farm again.

Changes have to come, he says. Like the one-room Lone Birch school he attended, the old-time 20-cow dairy farm can't survive.

Retirement has allowed Eastling to do what he hadn't been able to before: get out on the road. On his latest trip to Upper Michigan, we could have met along the road. Up there, you don't mind seeing a neighbor now and then.

If you remember my chapters about the "old Monson place" on which I live, you know it was once a typical 80-acre farm although marginal in productivity because of the soil. I often found parts from milking machines in the dumps here. The farm is now the site of four residences along a road becoming increasingly "built up."

"We are lucky," I preach to my companions, as we ride bicycles west on Oak Road to the corner with Highway 34, "to be able to see cows standing in a field."

Back at Seymour, one of the large modern residences sometimes known as "McMansions" occupies the corner of a field near my grandfather's house. If you want to visit his grave, just follow the signs to the golf course. The golf course and the cemetery stare at one another from equally scenic sites on what used to be some of the finest farm land in the renowned dairy state of Wisconsin.

10-12-02

Hurls Baby Into Furnace

Do you skip over wholesome and educational history stories in favor of tabloid-titillation? Thank goodness it happened that, 50 years ago, there was trouble in River City. Four women and four men were arraigned in justice court on “morals charges.” Warrants were issued for the arrest of two other men.

So, what in the name of Monica Lewinsky are morals charges? “Alleged illicit sexual relationships” between the four women and six men, all from the Wisconsin Rapids area.

Officers Donald Caylor and Dave Sharkey had been investigating the case for eight weeks. Most of the affairs, they said, took place at the home of one of the females involved.

Three of the females, all prefaced “Mrs.,” were charged with adultery. A fourth, identified as a divorcee, was charged with lewd and lascivious conduct and released to care for her two children.

What in the name of Snoop Doggy Dog is “lewd and lascivious conduct?” It’s better left to the imagination.

The morals investigation had begun “in earnest” after an anonymous early morning phone call identifying “some real parties” going on at a far east-side house. Following her eviction, the owner moved to a town of Grand Rapids address and the parties went with her.

When three of the females, accompanied by three males, traveled to Neenah together, the officers nabbed them. All

six offenders pleaded guilty in county court and another male was sent to the Green Bay Reformatory.

To find the furnace story, you will have to make your way through some local history. The 4th annual National Cranboree attracted 60,000 people on a Saturday afternoon in late September, 1952. During a post-parade speech at Witter Field, U.S. Sen. Alexander Wiley complimented “what I consider one of the finest civic expressions in the country.”

Marjorie Jensen, Cranboree queen, opted out of the local events to attend a similar festival in Massachusetts but an airline snafu caused them to also miss the Massachusetts fest.

Rapids mayor Carl C. Knudsen refused to consider a committee request for a \$500 appropriation to fund the Cranboree and Dick Davis, Cranboree general chairman, charged the mayor with using unfair tactics.

Consolidated’s Civic Foundation offered to contribute 20 percent of the cost of a proposed new municipal pool. A referendum on raising the tax rate to pay for the pool was scheduled for spring. A “long and often heated controversy” developed between Mayor Carl C. Knudsen and Alderman Walter Wefel, who wanted to appropriate the funds immediately. Knudsen: “We’re taxed to death by the federal and state governments. People holler about the mess in Washington and ask for tax cuts, but when it comes right down to home they don’t want to do it. We should start at home, and that’s what I’m trying to do.”

The two-story Wisconsin Valley Creamery brick building at 160 1st Ave. S. was razed by Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., the owner. Erected in 1907 by E.I. Chambers as a livery stable, it had been enlarged in 1914 for Mott Food & Produce Co. In 1916, Mott & Wood Co. was selling wholesale dairy products and farm produce. The name changed to Wisconsin Valley Dairy Products Co. in 1922 when Paul A. Pratt became president and became Wisconsin Valley Creamery Co. in 1926.

Elected (all Republican): Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, president, over Gov. Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois. Richard M. Nixon, vice president. Wood County’s vote: 14,617-6,914, in favor of Ike.

Walter Kohler, governor, over William Proxmire. Melvin R. Laird, 30, Marshfield Republican, elected for the first time to the U.S. Congress in the 7th District, over Ernest Kluck, Whiting. Arthur E. Berg, sheriff, over William Obermeier, a Democrat. Berg had been sheriff from 1947-51. Donald E. Reiland, Assembly. W.W. Clark, state senator. Joseph R. McCarthy, U.S. senator. At Madison, James Doyle, chairman of the state Democratic Organizing Committee, said: “To McCarthy: War unto the death.”

Alamask P-3 Concentrate. The first experiment in Wisconsin to alleviate the stench from kraft pulp mills, conducted at the Nekoosa mill of Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. Made by DuPont, the compound of synthetic aromatic chemicals produced a “spice-like” odor when added to pulp.

Winifred Binger: became the first woman and the 100th employee to retire under the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co.'s 1949 plan. She had worked for Nepco since the age of 16, beginning at the old paper mill at South Centralia. A ream cutter, "forelady" and "label girl," she recalled "finishing room girls" taken to and from the Centralia and Port mills in a wagon. On one occasion, the team broke away, leaving the girls stranded near the outskirts of the village.

Mrs. Van Hoof. The Roman Catholic farm woman claimed in 1950 to receive visions of the Blessed Virgin. The following year, the official newspaper of the Vatican discredited her claims. In October, 1952, a crowd of 5,000, including many aged and crippled, gathered at her home near Necedah.

Unrelated. In Restaurant Hospitality Month, an attempt was made to induce families to dine in restaurants, with these local establishments participating:

Hotel Mead, Johnny's Bar & Grill, Lake Aire, Golden Gate Supper Club, Swarick's.

Sugar Bowl, Paper Inn, Grand Grill, T-M Bar, Kerrin's Candy Store, Davis Restaurant, Friendly Fountain, Dixon Tap Room & Brig.

Wilpolt's Restaurant, Kenny's Grill, Yetter's 13th Street Grill, Edgetown Tavern, The Coach, The Midget, Chicken Hut, Lyle's Venetian Tavern, Al & Hazel's Bar, The Golden Eagle, Bowen's Restaurant.

Labor Temple, Anderson's Drug, Sunrise Tavern, Sky Club, The Meadows.

Beer cards. A "foolproof" identification card system, for use in proving age in taverns. It had been tried before. But now there was "lamination" of a standard ID card in a plastic case.

Deer season. Officials considered calling off hunting as officials debated the fire hazard in an autumn without rain since August but a timely downpour allowed "red-coated" hunters to bag one forked-horn buck each.

Don Ruder. The most consistent winner of stock car races at Crowns Speedway in 1952, shown with his "famed" Car 77, "became almost an automatic finisher in one of the top spots in all races."

Babe Parilli, in his first regular-season performance with the Packers, helped rout Curly Lambeau's Washington Redskins. Fifty years later, I tried to contact Babe Parilli at his home in Denver. But the Babe was out of town.

University of Wisconsin. Selected to represent the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl. UW had tied with Purdue for the conference championship.

Don Rehfeldt. The greatest basketball scorer ever to graduate from the University of Wisconsin, in 1952 a sales rep with Gross Common Carriers Inc., Wisconsin Rapids. The 6-7 center's career at Wisconsin, interrupted by military service, concluded in 1950. The Chicago native played two years of pro basketball with Baltimore and Milwaukee.

Ol' River Jug. The winner of the Stevens Point-Rapids Red Raiders game would be awarded "a chunk of earthen-

ware over which a tremendous amount of youthful energy has been expended in the past six years." Sealed within: "A quantity of gridiron grit and river water from the respective communities." The Panthers won in the final game of the season for both teams at Point's Goerke Park, thereby retaining the jug for the fourth straight year.

James Groszklaus. Lincoln High School senior tackle, named to Associated Press all-Wisconsin high school football team, the first local so-honored since Dean Showers in 1948.

"One Christmas Eve:" The newest book on the shelves in the children's department of T.B. Scott Public Library, written by Ripon native Miss Wallie Ritzinger, an assistant librarian here for five years. A Christmas story for everyday, in which a crippled boy with a big heart proves what it means to believe.

Fifty years ago [1952], according to the *Tribune*, a town of Grand Rapids mother grabbed her 3-month-old daughter, dashed into the basement, opened the furnace door and hurled the blanket-wrapped child head first into fiery coals. But the father, alarmed by his wife's behavior, had stayed home from work. He followed her to the basement, pushed his wife aside and yanked the baby from the furnace. The "mentally unbalanced" woman, a nurse by profession, suffering from what Dr. George Handy termed "acute depression," was committed to Winnebago State Hospital, Oshkosh, for observation.

Fifty years ago.

11-19-02

Kanieski

Santa couldn't wait to get to River City. In late November, he rolled into town on the Milwaukee Road train. A fire truck took him to the West Side and East Side market squares, where he met some of the 3,000 youngsters who would be attending free movies at the Wisconsin and Rapids theaters. My pals and I enjoyed the Christmas parties and Santa's personal visit on Christmas Eve.

Another boy my age was not so happy. Bad enough to be going blind. Bad enough that his family couldn't afford this Santa stuff; his father had been arrested for child abuse and was being held in jail.

Wood County's first murder trial in 17 years began Monday, Dec. 8, 1952, in Circuit Court under Judge Herbert A. Bunde where the boy's father, Edward F. Kanieski, 32, pleaded not guilty to first degree murder in the beating and strangulation of Clara Bates, 76, at Cad's Place, the tavern she owned east of Wisconsin Rapids.

The body of the victim was found on June 30, 1952, by Kanieski and Alvin Phipps, a neighbor of Bates, as described in an earlier "River City Memoirs."

Reports from the state crime laboratory showed that a hair found on the victim's bedspread was not inconsistent with a sample of Kanieski's pubic hair and that fibers on a noose around the victim's neck could have come from Kanieski's trousers. Consequently, Wood County sheriff Arthur Boll arrested the very person who had reported the crime.

District attorney John M. Potter worried that the apparent matches did not conclusively prove Kanieski had committed the murder or even that he was present at the time. Besides, hair on the bedspread also re-

sembled that of another possible male suspect.

There was and would be no confession. There was and would be no murder weapon found. There was no known motive and no witness to the crime.

But there were lots of pieces of a puzzle that seemed to portray Kanieski as Boll and Potter proceeded with the prosecution. For instance, doesn't a criminal return to the scene of the crime?

"Who runs that tavern?" Kanieski had asked Phipps, the day the two found the victim's body. "I think there's someone sick or hurt there."

But Kanieski well knew who ran Cad's Place. He had posed as a crop duster and promised to fly Cad to Iowa. Later, he put on bandages, said he had an accident and wouldn't be able to take her after all. "I lied to her but didn't mean anything wrong."

Puzzle piece: Phipps said two dogs were inside the Bates house when the murder was discovered but, earlier that day, he had seen the same dogs outside the house. Who let the dogs out and put them back in?

Furthermore, when Kanieski and Phipps found the body in a bedroom, Kanieski seemed oddly calm. Not a big deal, but worth mentioning.

When Sheriff Boll wanted him, Eddie Kanieski was easy to find. The suspect was in the county jail awaiting trial for carnal knowledge and abuse of a minor. In this and the murder case, the indigent Kanieski was represented by attorney Harold Billmeyer.

On August 1, 1952, a ten-year-old girl testified to Potter and Boll that Kanieski had sexual intercourse with her a few days before the murder. When Boll drove to the site of the crime, he noted that he passed the house of Linda Eberius. As deputy sheriff, he had investigated the shooting of Kanies-

ki by the elderly Mrs. Eberius as he tried to break into her house.

The 1950 prosecution by Kanieski trial judge Bunde, then district attorney, resulted in Kanieski's two-year sentence at Waupun state prison.

Boll, Potter and Bunde also knew that the Stevens Point native was the product of a distressed background that had landed him, in 1928, at St. Clare's orphanage, Polonia. Wisconsin Rapids resident John Vicker, then at the orphanage, said Kanieski told him he was building a big airplane and charged Vicker a nickel to see a wing he had in actuality found on a nearby farm. "Eddie could talk anybody out of anything," Vicker said.

When Kanieski began hiding in an attic above the large outhouse at the orphanage, "the Portage County Sheriff drove up and pulled ol' Eddie from the attic, and we never saw him again," he said. Kanieski's subsequent residences included Waukesha School for Boys; a Catholic school in Sturtevant; Green Bay Reformatory; Winnebago State Hospital and Waupun.

Pieces of the puzzle. If Bates were killed after her bar closed on the night of the murder, where was Kanieski?

He had provided conflicting stories of his activities on Saturday night, June 28-29, when the murder was believed to have occurred, and, according to Potter's later account, failed a lie detector test in Madison.

Kanieski was forced to admit he had been at Cad's on the night of the murder because five young people said they had seen him and Bates engaged in a private conversation. Shortly after Kanieski left the bar, Bates said she was tired and would like to close. When the young people left about 12:40 a.m., Bates seemed "nervous and excited."

During the three-day trial, Kanieski told a jury he had never been intimate with the victim, although he had been associated with two other women in the living quarters of the tavern home. "Clara Bates operated a type of sporting house where a man could buy a woman if he wanted to," he testified.

Kanieski said he hadn't told the truth earlier because he didn't want to get mixed up in the murder. "I didn't bother that woman in any way," he said.

The group of young people were making too much noise that night, he said, so he proceeded to Worzalla's tavern in Kellner. He stayed until closing and drove to his house in Wisconsin Rapids, where he arrived about 2 a.m. It was too hot, he said, and he spent most of the night sleeping in his car. He also said his wife was angry when he got home and that was why he slept most of the night in his car.

Pieces of the puzzle. Like the shoes.

When he searched the house, county officer Donald Caylor could not find the shoes Kanieski had been wearing the night of the murder. Caylor said he looked everywhere, including the attic.

Suddenly, the resoled shoes appeared in plain view, when a minister of Mrs. Mildred Kanieski's church looked into the attic. Kanieski said he had placed his only pair of dress oxfords in the attic to dry, because his son was trying to pull the new soles loose. Had the shoes been resoled to remove traces of evidence?

Pieces of the puzzle. Like the yellow sport shirt Kanieski had worn the night of the murder. His wife, Mildred, said at the trial that she had scorched it as she was ironing it. Afraid her husband would be angry, she destroyed the shirt by burning it.

What about scratches that appeared on his arm? Kanieski said he got them at work, from chipping tools. And he said he got

them from blueberry picking.

As Kanieski sat with "icy reserve" before Judge Bunde, the jurors stood one by one and repeated, "Guilty." The first ballot had been 8-4 for conviction, then 10-2, 11-1 and finally, unanimous. A male juror said the major factor was "discrepancies" in the defendant's testimony.

Kanieski was sentenced to life imprisonment at Waupun. Bunde: "You were convicted of a terrible, horrible crime—a useless and thoughtless type of crime..."

"It wasn't proven."

"It is the court's opinion that you are guilty as well as the jury's opinion."

Bunde told Kanieski that if he wanted forgiveness, he should look to God.

Defense attorney Billmeyer presented an unsuccessful motion for a new trial, claiming the evidence was insufficient to prove the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Sheriff Boll, who had been defeated for reelection, summed up: "It was a baffling case in which the convicted murderer was under suspicion from the time he returned to the scene of his crime and reported the murder to us ... But, with the hard work of all members of my department and the cooperation of the district attorney, the case was brought to a successful conclusion."

In 1971, prisoner Kanieski underwent heart surgery at University Hospital, Madison. The same year, his conviction was overturned by the Wisconsin Supreme Court and he was released from prison in 1972.

The court agreed with what Billmeyer had said, nineteen years previous. There was not enough evidence that the defendant was guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

After his release, Kanieski moved back to Wisconsin Rapids and died in 1975.

In his 1993 book, *The Tangled Web*, former district attorney Potter considered an-

other piece of the puzzle. Was it possible that Cad Bates had been killed by Ed Gein? Potter said Gein denied any knowledge of Bates and that officers could not link him with the crime.

At Gein's 1958 sanity hearing, the presiding judge was the Kanieski case's Herbert Bunde.

The wife of Edward Kanieski Jr., Colleen Kohler Kanieski, wrote the 1995 memoir, *Please Pass the Roses*, describing Edward Jr.'s struggles against his own progressive blindness and his father's conviction.

Edward Jr. remembered the day his father was taken to jail. As father and son sat on a bench outside the courtroom of the old courthouse, two "big guys" "pulled Dad's wrists together in front of him to put cuffs on. Dad tried to hide them from me, but I saw them ... It made me angry. I ran toward the guy who'd put the cuffs on Dad and began to kick him. The guy thought it was funny. He laughed and pushed me away."

At the trial, it seemed to some that the primarily female jury had to hurry home to prepare for the Christmas holiday "so deliberations were brief."

After the sentencing, wrote Kohler-Kanieski, Eddie's mother, Mildred, wrote to a local radio program, "Letters to Santa." Edward Jr. would hurry home from school to listen to the little radio in the kitchen, while his mother fixed supper. "Then, one night, they actually read his!" wrote Kohler-Kanieski. "Of course, they kindly edited out any reference to his father's imprisonment."

"He was so excited when his letter won second prize. His mom took him down to pick up his prize. Of all things, he had won a garbage truck." Later, he said, "It told me exactly what the people of Wisconsin Rapids thought of me."

12-07-02

Knuth's Beat

River City, 1953.
Former city police officer Don Knuth, 80, 140 Canal St., can tell you who owned or operated almost any business here. In many cases, he can compile a reliable genealogy complete with nicknames.

On Christmas Eve, fifty years ago, many local businesses advertised in the *Daily Tribune*. With this list in hand, I asked Knuth about some of the taverns and restaurants, grocery stores and gas stations of our town.

The first paragraph identifying each site is taken from the *Tribune* ad, followed by Knuth's comments.

Bars and Restaurants

•Edgetown Tavern. Over the West Grand Avenue viaduct "and to your right." Earl and Evie Keuntjes.

Don Knuth: "It was a good bar and supper club. The exclusive ones then were Wilbern's and the Mead. Joe and Irma Parzy had it for many years. Irma then went to the Mead and Joe worked at Consoweld.

Edgetown is now [2003] Goose's Pub.

•Swarick's. 641 W. Grand Ave.

Knuth: "Owned by Chester Swarick. Chet's father, Frank, had started a tavern on the north side of West Grand in the 600 block in 1933 when the country 'went wet.' After a few years, Frank sold the tavern to Joe and Ann Romanski and then started the Golden Gate supper club on Highway 13 South, now Lance's. After Chet died, Swarick's was owned by Clint and Verna Falkosky."

Both the Swarick and Romanski tavern buildings on Grand Avenue were razed for the Rapids Mall project.

•The Midget. 625 West Grand. Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Jones.

Knuth: "There were three business places

in an old frame building owned by the Bender brothers: the Midget restaurant, a barber shop and the Dixie Bar, run by Red Bouton, Buzz's older brother. Red came into town as a baseball player."

Building razed for Rapids Mall.

•The Square Bar. On the West Side Market Square. Reine Kroll, Prop.

"Reine, long deceased, started the Square Bar. He had managed the Labor Temple Bar above the Kroger store on West Grand Avenue in the 200 block."

Still in same location.

•Dixon Hotel Tap Room and Brig.

"Dick Boehme's grandmother purchased the hotel. Dick's parents took over management. His dad, William "Spider" Boehme, started the Chinese cuisine they were known for. He was also a musician."

Building razed for City Hall parking lot.

•Bill's Billiards (above Kroger's) 251 W. Grand Ave.

"Owned by brothers Bill and Sam Houston. After a few years, Bill moved to Washington state. Sam sold the business to Ted Walrath, who started a 'recreation center' in the Palace Theatre building, now the Central Wisconsin Cultural Center, 240 Johnson St. A younger brother, Jimmy Houston, is an ace pool player still.

"Bill had started some time after 'Fritz and Pete's, on the first floor of the Mead Witter building, owned by Fritz Hribernik and Pete Sakalosky, had gone out of business."

•The Badger Bar. 150 1st St. N. Edward Kleppin, Prop.

"It was strictly a tavern. Kleppin's brother, Leo, was a partner with Van Kubisiak in the Hiawatha Bar at 7th and W. Grand. That was another shot-and-a-beer place."

Became David Harold's. Recently resold.

•Sugar Bowl. 170 2nd St. S.

"It was a nice restaurant owned by Tom Poulos, who also owned the Rapids Theatre. His wife was Mabel Reber from Rudolph. There was another Greek involved. Jimmy Drivas, a faithful employee, stayed with him until the end. I admired the Greeks. They were

not afraid to work 18-20 hours a day. It was the first restaurant with "radar" cooking. They also made candy and sold it at the counter."

Building razed for riverbank park.

•Friendly Fountain. Next to Rapids Theatre.

"Bob Luzenski owned it. Walter Herschleb had built it as an ice cream parlor. It was a good stopping place for high school kids after the show or after school. There were booths and a counter. I always liked the malted milks."

Now part of Rogers Cinema.

•Johnny & Ruby's Bar.

"Ruby Avenue is named after Ruby, the wife of John Dove Sr. Dove Avenue was part of Dove's property. John Dove Jr. is on the county board."

•Lake Aire. South on Highway 13, across Nepco Lake.

"It was one of our better supper clubs even way back. Clayton and Winifred Snyder had it a number of years. Later, it was owned by Roger Ebbe. His father, Harlow, had a motel by what is now County Market (Ebbe's Motor Haven, 2021 8th Street S.)."

Lake Aire, now owned by Charles and Kathy Sedevie.

•Johnny's Bar and Grill. Highway 54 East.

"It was on the site of the later Jimmy's supper club. John Emerson owned it. Johnny had owned a liquor store on W. Grand in the Walloch building, which was adjacent to Johnson Hill."

•Skyway Ballroom. Betty Joslin, Mr. and Mrs. Larry Dhein, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Amundson.

"It was a dance hall and roller skating rink in a Quonset on the airport side of 1st St. S. on Sand Hill.

"Sand Hill was equated with the three Neitzel brothers, one of whom furnished most of the mason sand used in town. At first, he hauled it from the sand pit with a team of horses. The Neitzel location is now the site of several office buildings on Daly Ave. Skyway was destroyed by fire."

•Johnny Kuenn's ABC Bar.

"Johnny's also served dinners, fish fries and the like. Johnny Kuenn came to town as a

baseball player in the late 1920s or early 1930s. He, like Red Bouton, played semi-pro at Witter Field, where I liked to sneak in under the fence if my uncle couldn't take me."

Johnny's was long known as the Lincoln Street Bar. Now, Ida's.

Grocery Stores

•Harold R. Kelley Grocery 960 1st St. N.

"It was across from the swimming pool.

There were rooms for rent upstairs. Way back, it was owned by Mrs. Haefner. Bill Aschenbrenner had a TV store in there. It was a historic old building. The place burned."

Now, a vacant lot.

•Produce Market. 631 W. Grand Ave.

"Originally Anderson's bakery. Owned for many years by Babe Lutz. There were apartments upstairs. It was two-story brick. Strictly vegetables and fruit in large quantities."

Razed for Rapids Mall.

•Gottschalk's Grocery.

"The cranberry family. This is the grandfather to them all. Gottschalk was a typical old grocer with a white apron. His son, Bob, married a Rezin. Old Gottschalk and Anderson owned a lot of property on the West Side. It was a two-story brick building with apartments and professional offices upstairs, next to Guarantee Hardware at the northwest corner of 4th Avenue and West Grand.

"Later, we, in the police department used it, while the new city hall was being built. Blenkers TV was in there too."

Razed for Rapids Mall/City Hall.

•Peters Grocery. 1051 Baker St.

"It was at 11th and Baker, now a vacant lot for an auto supply store. Two fellows, Peters and Martin, had a little grocery store. It was torn down and a big building built where the auto supply is."

•King Henry's Trading Post. 220 Johnson St.

"Henry Weltman owned it. It was an early low-markup operation. He owned several buildings in that block."

Now, a union hall.

•Diebels Food Shop. 122 8th St. So.

"It was originally built by the Miller family

and was Miller's Grocery. Karl Bremmer owns it."

Still standing.

•First St. Market & Grill. Next to Green Bay Depot. T. Sabota, S. Konietzki.

"Teofel Sabota and Sylvester Konietzki were brothers-in-law. A big frame building, it had been the grocery of Val Siewert, the father of Johnny Siewert. Later, it was a used furniture store owned by Ed and Syl Konietzki, who were brothers."

Service Stations

•Jake's Cities Service Station.

Across from the Palace Theatre "at 3rd Avenue S. and Johnson.

"It was set at an angle. A gas station with no service bay. Owned by Jake Frechette.

"Jake's mother, 'Ma' Frechette, lived across from the high school. She had a little eating place in her house. The kids who didn't want to eat in the cafeteria could get something there. Her building is still there at 341 6th Street S."

Jake's: Now, US Bank parking lot.

•Nieman's DX Service. 810 W. Grand Ave.

"The owner, Herbert Nieman, is still in business at 2141 W. Grand Ave."

Building now vacant.

•Billmeyer Super Service. 1820 Baker Drive.

"It was a Mobil station owned by Paul Billmeyer, who lived next door. When I moonlighted and drove a gas and oil truck for my cousin, Harold, I delivered there.

"Paul was a son of A.F. Billmeyer, the architect and builder, as were Carl, also an architect, Harold, a lawyer, and Rod, who had Rod's tavern.

Super Service is now Rollin' Dough pizza.

•Polansky Service Station and Hudson Sales & Service. Cor. 8th & E. Grand Ave.

"A two-bay service station: gasoline and auto repairs. Sold used cars too. Carl Polansky had been service manager with Bethke Chevrolet and Olds garage."

Now, Keysavings bank location.

•Wolcott Garage & Auto Wrecking.

"It was on (421) Daly originally across from the new River Cities Bank. Then it moved to

8th St.

"Morris Wolcott ended up president of Community State Bank."

Now Riverview Expressway area.

•Ronnie's Wadhams Service. 210 E. Grand Ave.

"Ronnie Hanson later moved to 8th St. where the Expressway is."

Site now a parking lot adjacent to Rogers Cinemas.

•Auto Electric. 131 N. 3rd St.

"Owned by Ed Steiner and George Boddette."

Still in business with new owners.

•Consolidated. 8th & Plum. Charles "Squirt" Berard, manager.

"A service station later owned by Maynard Paterick. Now 'Super Wash.'"

•Reliable Auto Body. 2521 W. Grand.

"Then owned by Chuck Sparhawk. Now Sparhawk Trucking and Esquire Mufflers, owned by Tom Sparhawk, Chuck's son."

•(Art) Jevnick's Standard Service. 8th & Chestnut.

"Jevnick later owned a supper club in Kellner and Safe-Way Bus Transit."

•Christy Service. 611 E. Grand Ave.

"Now auto, truck and U-Haul rental place."

•Clark's Super Gas Station, 511 E. Grand. Now Domino's Pizza.

•(Adolph) Schmidt and (Wilbur) Fisher Mobil Service. 8th & E. Grand.

Now Rapids Shell location.

In fact and fancy, River City was a smaller town fifty years ago. Along Grand Avenue, Baker Drive, 8th Street and the other thoroughfares, business places were owned, not by faraway corporations, but by neighbors with faces and names you could put a finger on.

01-11-03

Elksquire 1945

I see where the Lily White Leaguers have been trying to simonize the sin out of Wisconsin Rapids. Next, I expect to pick up a paper and see where prohibition has been declared.

Just kidding.

The quote comes from a letter printed in the June 1945 "Elksquire," a World War II-era publication of Wisconsin Rapids Lodge No. 693, B.P.O.E., that was sent to servicemen around the world.

The issue at hand was loaned by Joe and Irma Parzy, 1840 Clark St., former owners (1952-62) of the Edgetown supper club.

"The Elksquire," edited by Bernie Ziegler with assistance from Ole Rember, printed letters from overseas soldiers, including Cpl. Harold Witt, who wrote: "I had a very pleasant surprise on the boat going over. I met Earl Odegard [sic] and one of the Parzy boys (Joe's older brother, Sylvester). It was really nice to meet someone you know."

Others had similar experiences. In the Philippines, Frederick Brahmsteadt had met up with Dennis Plowman, Bill Sherman and "a Konopacki." In the Netherland Indies, Tony Schultz had encountered Clint Falkowski, Bill Jackson, Hank Schulter, Hans Wagner and others of the 32nd Division.

An entertaining letter came from William H. ("Spider") Boehme of the Dixon hotel. It was Boehme who penned the "simonize" paragraph above.

"A few days ago," he wrote, "I received the first mail for a long time and was pleased to get a few copies of the Elksquire, my membership card, a bonafide liquor license from the state of Washington, the vest pocket edition of Wisconsin Rapids *Tribune*, and an advertising circular about how to build

homes out of soy beans after the war...

"Out of all the places I have been, I regret to say I haven't as yet met anyone from Wisconsin Rapids, the closest being a guy who once caught a fish in Nepco Lake. Most of the fellows on board are from the East and I spend much of my time telling them of the superiority of the Big Ten, Milwaukee beer, and I finally fall back on the cheese.

"...I hope the high moguls that are going to rebuild the city in my absence, don't run a bridge or highway through the middle of the Dixon Hotel."

Another letter published in "The Elksquire" came from Tom Utegaard (whose mother, Isabel, ran for mayor in 1952). "At sea" with the Navy, Utegaard said he more than ever appreciated the town and country he had lived in. "I'll bet you there is not one person receiving Elksquire who doesn't read it just after the letters from home, and puts it away, feeling not a little homesick."

Another correspondent, Jim McCourt, helped liberate 900 Yanks from a German prison camp and described appalling conditions. By contrast, while his unit was on the move, he said, it found German beer, wine, cognac and champagne, all "on the house."

"The Elksquire" noted the June death of Burt Williams, "Promotional director" for Consolidated, a former newspaper publisher and prominent Democrat. He was the father-in-law of Consolidated president, Stanton Mead.

The new bridge proposed for Jackson street? Consolidated was against it.

At a City Hall hearing before state officials, Stanton Mead and Ralph Cole, Consolidated treasurer, advocated widening of the present bridge instead. Consolidated objected to the destruction of the firm's park system; the congestion that would be created at its main mill entrance; and the increased danger of flooding the mill and office.

Meanwhile, Rapids Mayor Carl C. Knudsen presented his plan for a bridge connecting Chase and Witter streets, lining up a proposed new east-west thoroughfare.

The buzz word was "integration." Companies were integrated if they produced both pulp and paper. Besides ground wood and chemically produced pulp and a variety of enamel papers, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. produced all of its own electric power and a substantial portion of its pulpwood. Not to mention paperboard, shipping containers, cartons, tubes, coated opaque waxing, tissues, crepe, manifold papers, and Consoweld, a decorative-plastics surfacing material.

Sales of the Consolidated specialty, coated enamel paper, had increased since WWII, prompting two new lines: Consolith and Productolith.

My 1985 book, "River City Memoirs III," was printed on Productolith; the 1988 "Fat Memoirs" used Consolith.

Of Consolidated's neighbor to the south, with headquarters in Port Edwards: "The highest sales volume in the history of Nekoosa-Edwards Paper co. was attained in 1952, and the greatest expansion and modernization program in our history is almost completed," declared John E. Alexander, NEPCO president and general manager.

Preway:

Ralph S. Wilttrout and Michael Woolf resigned from leadership positions and were replaced by J.O. Ellis, president and general manager, and D.F. Abel, director of sales. Ellis said that 1952 was a record year for the company that made oil-burning space heaters, electric ranges, gas ranges, furnace equipment and camp equipment.

Technology

It just keeps happening.

Fifty years ago, the Wood County Telephone Co. was keeping up with it by install-

ing a microfilm recording system, according to general manager H.B. Flower. Now the phone company could record the exact details of each completed long distance call.

During 1952, the company also had acquired four "switched-line" companies in the rural area west and north of Rapids. WCTC also had eliminated all company-owned crank type rural telephones in favor of "modern" eight-party rural service.

The company also was proceeding with the purchase of the Chrystal Saratoga Telephone Co. that served an area south from Two Mile Avenue to the Adams County line.

Riverview

Fifty years ago (in 1952) it was 50 years old as an institution. The first hospital building looked like a large, white house. It was followed by brick structures in 1915 and 1940.

Doctors who had joined the hospital staff in the 1930s were: O.A. Backus, Wallace Nelson, R.E. Garrison, Leland Pomainville, F.J. Pomainville and Harold Pomainville. In the 1940s came E.G. Glenn, E.G. Barnet, J.J. Smullen, L.J. Bennett, Elmer Debus and George Handy.

Wood County Normal

Fifty years ago, like the hospital, it was 50 years old. It had been built under the leadership of E.P. Arpin and others as a new type of institution, devoted to training teachers for work in rural and state graded systems. An estimated 1,300 teachers already had graduated from the school, nearly half of whom remained in Wood County, according to the *Tribune*.

Prof. M.H. Jackson was the first principal. The first classrooms were in the pre-1931 Lincoln High School. All 22 of the first graduates were female.

Applicants needed an eighth-grade education. Graduating teachers were paid be-

tween \$30 and \$40 monthly. After three years, the school was moved to the Howe building and the "fight" with Marshfield for a new school began, settled in favor of Rapids in 1907.

Last train from Nekoosa

A story by J. Marshall Buehler chronicled the last passenger train out of Nekoosa, as service, which had begun in 1892, was terminated in 1952. Off the main line on its own loop, Nekoosa always had been a problem location.

Indian agency

According to Leo Pratt, local Indian Land Field Agent, recently of Oklahoma, the Wisconsin Rapids Indian Service field office was opened to settle land holdings of deceased Indians and to review the land problems of Winnebago Indians in central Wisconsin. Pratt said most of the Winnebago land was suitable for forest crops only and the owners had moved to areas closer to towns and places of employment.

Sports

If you know Rapids basketball, you know the Gurtlers. Charlie Gurtler had been instrumental in Rapids winning the 1951 state high school tournament title and had broken nearly every school scoring record. He had led the Red Raiders to an 18-2 regular season in 1951-52. Rapids had scored 673 points to their opponents' 381, before being knocked out of the tournament by an opening round loss to Waupaca.

For the team of 1952-53, reserve Tom Gurtler scored 17 points of a record total 120 against Merrill, although the leading scorer was Wayne Oestreich.

Jim Grosklous, LHS football tackle for three years, was one of three Wisconsin players chosen to the all-American high school football squad for 1952.

The UW football Badgers lost in the 1953 Rose Bowl to USC despite the efforts

of Alan (The Horse) Ameche.

Ed Hanson, *Daily Tribune* sports editor and sportscaster for regular Wisconsin football games, assisted the NBC announcer at the Rose Bowl.

Too many Daves

Long-time reader Dave Billmeyer corrected last month's story: Service station owner Paul Billmeyer was not the son of A.F. Billmeyer, as stated. He was the son of A.F.'s brother, Frank, which made Paul not the brother but the cousin of Rod, Harold and Carl, the latter being Dave's father.

Imagine

Spider.

The wry commander of the Brig, a subterranean saloon at the Dixon Hotel. Yes, they put a bridge through it: and a City Hall.

John Lennon

In my first year as a cub reporter at the *Daily Tribune*, John Lennon was murdered. My eulogy was an exercise in hepcat bop. Then *River City Memoirs* came for me and I donned the cloak of municipal historian. My accomplishment was to borrow the name from a town that knew how to spell trouble. This year, Lennon's fellow Beatle, George Harrison, the philosophical one, died of natural causes. It was around 1970 that I had been so absorbed by Harrison's dreamy solo album, "All Things Must Pass."

All things must pass away.

So he says.

"Simonize."

Who even knows what it means anymore?

02-08-03

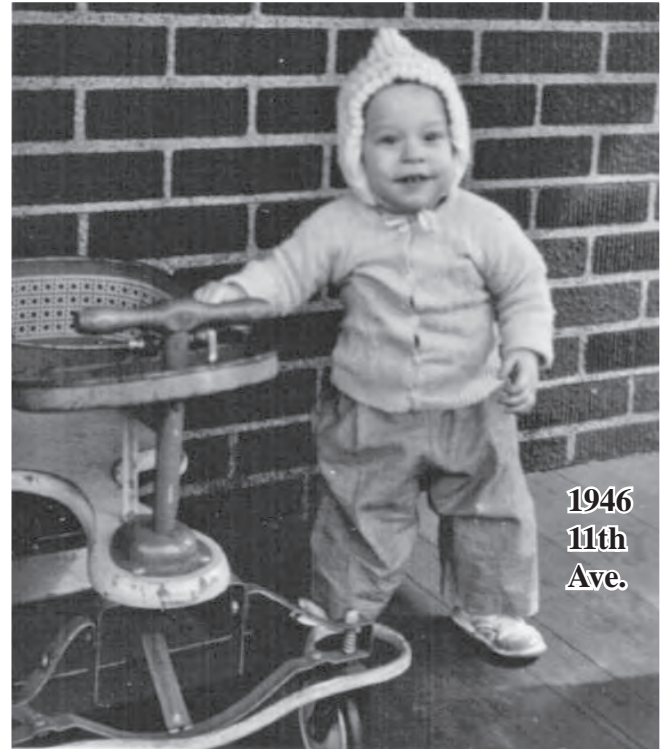


Ghost
of
My-
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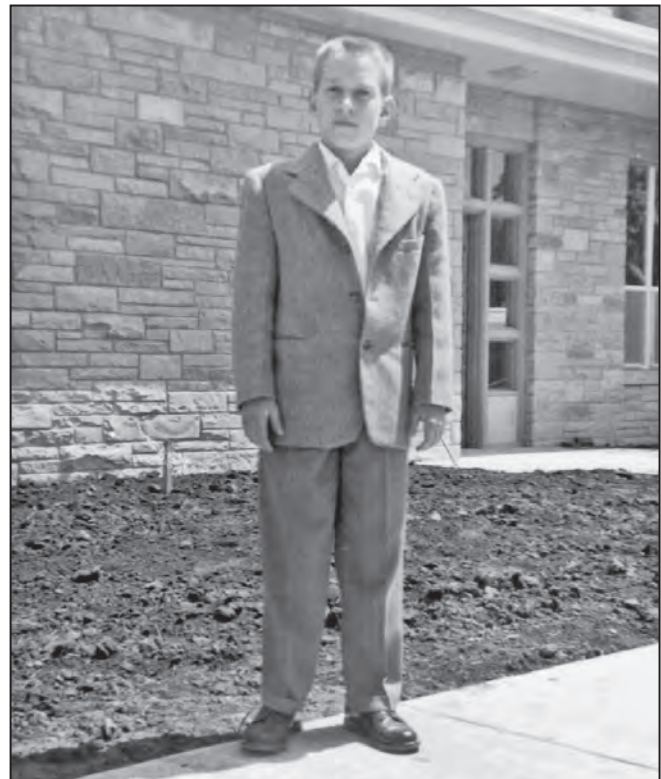
1952? Two Mile School



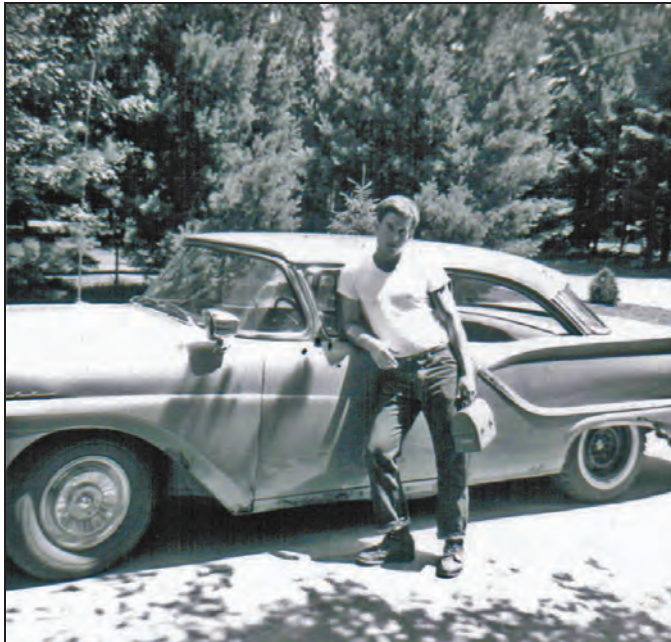
1963 "Beer card"



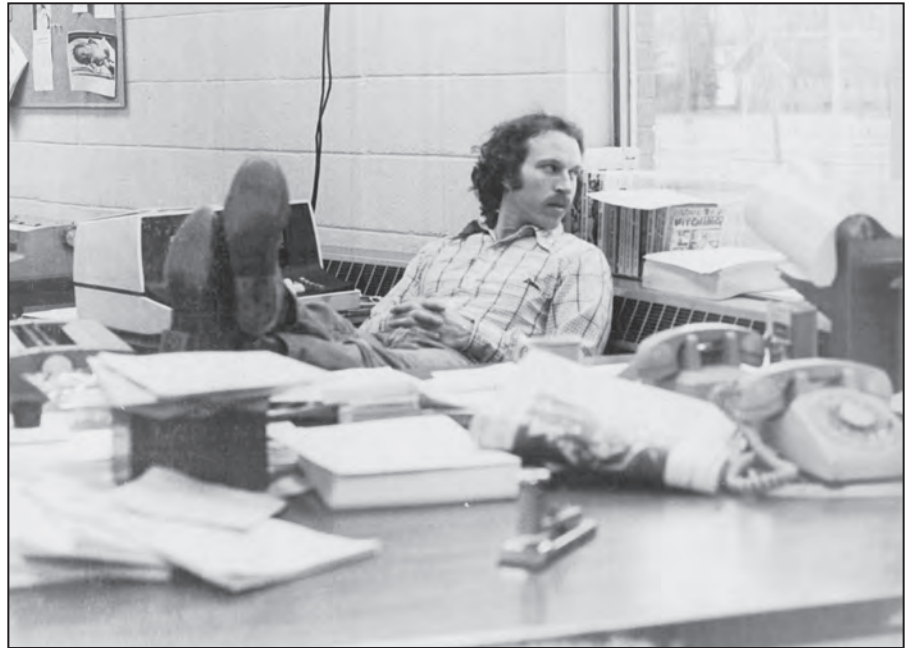
1946
11th
Ave.



1958 First Methodist church



1965 Millworker "3-11"



1980, at *Daily Tribune*

*At
Walden
Pond,
Wrestling
with
Thoreau
2007*



Pull Up Your Socks

Remember me? Sometimes we're away for a while and when we come back, maybe we're not exactly what we were.

When I met a grizzled homeboy I figured was you last summer, I used the same greeting I had liked so well back at Lincoln high in the old millennium. "Pull up your socks, Hackersmith!"

The reply was a blank stare I interpreted as, "Talking to me, dingleberry?"

To me, it made sense to see you grabbing some Gatorade at West Grand I.G.A.; your brother, Bernie Enkro, owned the store. You, Lafe, had worked at nearby "Paperboard" and resided for years up the street, I thought. But the only meaningful dialogue came at the end of the conversation. "Running ten miles a day. Getting back in shape."

Back in shape from what?

For me, the I.G.A. incident was one of several encounters with a listless personal obscurity that left me suffering from a low profile. A local teacher recently told her class, "We had a history guy named Dave Engel but I think he's dead."

Fortunately, one of the pupils, through personal testimony, was able to set the record straight: "Dave Engel is my dad."

When I brought my dog to Doc Rasmussen this morning (a couple blocks from the I.G.A. mentioned above), one of Doc's gals said, "Saw Queenie in the Tribune. So, what have YOU been up to?"

Not dead but forgotten, unlike "the Duke," who is dead but unforgotten as long as the antediluvians of "old" Lincoln high school roam the earth. Whenever the tweedy Englishman, Prof. Alfred "Duke" Hornigold, emerged from the bio-chem cloisters he shared with his comrade, Mrs. Kumm, and spied you in the hallway, he ordered in classic stentorian style, "Pull up your socks, Hackersmith!"

Little did we acolytes know to whom he alluded: George Hackenschmidt, a former world champion wrestler in the tradition of Nekoosa's own Strangler Lewis.

No grappler I had grabbed, and I grabbed a few, was less fun to knock knickers with than our own Lafe "Hackersmith" Enkro, unless the party of the first part liked being poked, elbowed, scratched, kicked, cuffed, gouged, butted, bitten and chewed on like a piece of Juicy Fruit gum.

No one was more fun to watch.

Year by year, moving up in weight class but not in height, you became the most fearless, most flamboyant and shortest heavyweight in Red Raider history, sporting wacky black wrestling boots and the style of Hackenschmidt himself, who, a biographer said, tore into his rivals like a "Russian Lion."

As happens with classmates, we went our ways and the years floated by in chunks of ten until September 2003 and the 40-year Lincoln-Assumption reunion at the Elks Club.

Face to face and heart to heart with the real Lafe, it was plainly obvious that the jogger I annoyed at the I.G.A. did not resemble you in the least; I have no idea who he was. Plainly, I should have pulled up my socks.

Following the reunion trivia contest won by John Jay's table in a close contest with Butch La Chapelle ("Who stole Lincoln's head?"), I offered a few remarks. The point was simple; we have been together in this world longer than many of us realized. I had known emcee George Zimmerman since he greeted me at Grove School as "Inky," 48 years ago. I had met you, Lafe, and your sister, Jennifer, four years earlier, at Two Mile school. Truman was President.

According to the invitation for your surprise birthday party, you're the first classmate who can truthfully boast of being a practicing sexagenarian. Wish I could have been at the party.

But that's why we write these RSVPs, so we can be places we are not and talk to those we cannot see. So we can pass some time with old friends and thank them for bringing amusement and inspiration our way. So we can say, "I remember you, pal. Happy birthday."

04-12-04

Indian Jeff

For my first baby steps down the history trail, pundits pointed me to the venerable “Taylor book” laid open in the basement at McMillan Memorial Library. Taylor was the man then, but, as decades passed, casual scholars forgot the difference between T.A. Taylor and Y.A. Tittle.

According to his 1961 obituary, Theodore Asa “Tom” Taylor died at age 94 in California.

Seventy years earlier, which would be in the 19th Century, he had arrived in Rapids from Menasha. Here, he promoted his insurance business by printing historical photos on advertising materials. He later worked for the Consolidated paper company as a land buyer.

Most important to us, Taylor was commissioned by the Wisconsin Rapids City Council in 1934 to compile a pictorial history he continued to add to through 1940. The resulting oversize photo album and book of text were placed on public display in the T.B. Scott Public Library (now the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum) on Third Street for 30 years or more.

After McMillan library supplanted the Scott facility, the fragile Taylor photos were viewable by request but displayed infrequently. Copy work was done by Lilas Smith of Consolidated and preservation procedures instituted by then Head of Adult Services Ken Hall.

Now, as part of Local History On-Line, a project of McMillan’s Assistant

Director Andy Barnett and current Head of Adult Services Don Litzer, the Taylor book is more widely accessible than ever.

It’s Monday; are you ready for some history? A few teasers from a chronology published on the McMillan website from Taylor’s “Historical Wisconsin Rapids 2nd Vol.”:

Way back in 1829, closer to the War of 1812 than the War Between the States, Lt. Jefferson Davis was dispatched from Fort Winnebago, at Portage, Wis., to remove Daniel Whitney’s illicit shingle-making operation on the Yellow River. This was the same Jefferson Davis later to become President of the Confederate States of America.

By coincidence, Davis’ counterpart, Abraham Lincoln, was also in the neighborhood during the Black Hawk “war,” noting later that all he slaughtered were mosquitoes.

About 1980, E.P. Arpin, Jr., formerly of Wisconsin Rapids, then of Neenah, told me he had found, in Arpin lumber company records, mention of a Native American named “Indian Jeff.” He said the former Arpin employee was believed to be the son of Jefferson Davis, the Confederate leader. Presumably, Indian Jeff would have been about 70 years old in 1900.

Arpin said I should take a look at those records and, through his insistence, implanted an image of aged leather-bound books with lists of names that I remember or imagine, included “Indian Jeff” and “Jeff Davis.”

Did Jefferson Davis father an illegitimate son in Wisconsin? The first weakness in this account stems from Arpin’s memory, of which he was pretty certain, and mine, of which I am not. Beyond that, those who knew Indian Jeff could have been mistaken about his identity as he might have been himself.

Certainly it’s all pretty much hearsay; we should not haphazardly embellish in print the reputation of our founding fathers. Fortunately, Davis wasn’t one of OUR founding fathers. He was one of THEIR founding fathers, so he can remain a certifiable reprobate.

Creeping toward our time, in 1831, Green Bay investor Daniel Whitney built the first saw mill on the Wisconsin River at “Whitney Rapids,” the site of present day Nekoosa.

And, surprising to me, in 1835, the steamboat, “Frontier,” chugged up the Wisconsin River from Prairie du Chien to Point Basse, just below Whitney Rapids. Other steamboats followed but dams soon blocked river traffic.

In 1841, Whitney bought the south end of “Long Island” in what was to be Wisconsin Rapids. According to Taylor’s timeline, Peter Love constructed the first summer cottage here about 1912. T.A. Taylor himself added the next cottage in 1914, along with concrete tennis courts.

When you find yourself Love-Love on an island in the river and wonder whose court you’re on, check out the Taylor book.

04-19-04

Mayor Bach

River City - Where some see a parking lot of lost opportunities, Wisconsin Rapids mayor Jerry Bach views the most valuable real estate in town. It's the place Montgomery Ward used to be, across Grand Avenue from the River Block, adjacent to riverbank park land. Why not an apartment house with a fine restaurant?

"The hardest thing is the vision," Bach says.

That's because we're just out of "a cradle-to-grave dependence on CPI and Nekoosa Papers." Years of letting George do it. "If George didn't do it, or if he didn't want it done, it wasn't done."

"Our quality of life is hard to beat." The mayor points to medical facilities "sound as a rock," excellent schools, public library, performing arts center, skateboard park, soccer fields, BMX track, softball fields, golf courses and fishing off the downtown pier.

When Bach graduated from the University of Minnesota, "just like I hear young people saying now, there was nothing in Rapids for me to do. I didn't want to work for the paper company." His forestry degree led him to Utah and Idaho, prior to returning homeward via Consolidated's northern Minnesota timberland operations. Then, the Duluth technical school, teaching young timber workers. And, his own logging business.

From 1970-83, "What Rapids is going through, I saw Duluth go through because the taconite industry left. I go back to Duluth now and look at the changes they had to make.

"Duluth is a neat city. You drive over the hill and there's the big mall and you get to the downtown; that's now the working space. We don't have the population but that's what our downtown is. It's not going to be a retail center. What we're talking about here is a place to live and work. We've got the River Block building, the Mead-Witter building, Marty Schreiber's, the bank, the mall. If people that worked in these places could live close by, you start bringing a little bit of a European-style community back."

Fueling Bach's enthusiasm are fond memories of the old downtown, from the Sugar Bowl restaurant to the Wisconsin Theater. "Remember how big and plush that used to seem? You come back now and the buildings aren't as big as they were. But it was a community that had some vibrancy to it that I think can be brought back again."

When Bach attended Assumption high school 1957-61, the new football coach, Don Penza, became a role model. "He helped me get an athletic scholarship to college. I had a lot of respect for coach Penza. Then, seeing him become mayor. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be here with my picture on the wall downstairs beside his."

Another role model is Bach's grandfa-

ther. "He could hardly see and yet he ran this farm. He put so much faith in me. I was cultivating corn and driving the tractor with the hay baler and those sorts of things before I was ten years old."

He also admires his parents, "two common folks." His father worked at Hemmersbach Motors as parts manager; his mother was a nurse at Riverview Hospital. ("She probably delivered you.")

"Mom would work eleven at night until seven in the morning. She'd be home to get breakfast for us kids; then we'd all go to school and she'd nap during the day. We never knew we had a working mother."

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Forget Me Not: The late (April 12, 2004) Thomas J. Narlock, 63, whose enthusiasm for the likes of Gene Vincent ("Be Bop A Lula") was contagious. Tom gave me the phrase, "Put the pedal to the metal," and I use it every chance I get.

04-26-04

Alice's Restaurant Monday

Gotta love Joe's Place. Settled in an easy chair with a hot "cuppa" whatever, *Daily Tribune* in hand. Or should I call it "Alice's Restaurant," where you can get anything you want?

Arlo Guthrie, in the "Alice" song, does his dirty deeds via a VW "microbus" and by jiminy there's one down at Joe's Place too, stuck inside the Mead-Witter building like a ship in a bottle.

Joe and Alice Wallner call their coffee house at 250 West Grand Avenue "From the Ground Up." But rather than type and retype "From the Ground Up," I asked Joe if I could refer to it as "Joe's."

Like a good husband, he suggested I use his wife's name. Maybe "Alice's Restaurant." Like a good wife, Alice said, no big deal, "Joe's" is fine.

That's how quotidian it was on an Organic-Ethiopian Tanzanian-Peaberry-Supreme Fair-trade-Guatemalan Monday in 2004.

Until I opened the newspaper. It was like 9-11 all over again.

Hot off the wire, early on a Monday afternoon, I read that three men and a woman fired pistols from the Ladies Gallery and wounded at least five members of the House of Representatives.

On a Monday, as some safely sipped their cuppa-whatever elsewhere, spectators grappled with terrorists in the Capi-

tol until police arrived. And Speaker Joseph Martin, who ducked for cover but got back to rap for order, asked members to take their seats long enough to recess the House and clear the galleries.

Monday afternoon, March 1, 1954.

Fifty years ago. The worst terrorist attack ever on Congress. The shooters: Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Irving Flores, Lolita Lebron.

Lolita Lebron, 34, displayed a Puerto Rican flag and shouted, "Viva Puerto Rico libre!" And she joined her comrades, firing shots with automatic pistols at the helpless legislators scurrying for cover below.

Congressmen present that day: about 240. Shots fired: 29 or 30.

Congressmen injured: 5.

The worst, Alvin M. Bentley (R-Mich), 35, shot in the chest. Others were Ben F. Jensen (R-Iowa), Clifford Davis (D-Tenn), Kenneth A. Roberts (D-Ala) and George H. Fallon (D-Md).

"I didn't realize it was real until I saw the flames coming from their guns," Wisconsin Rep. O'Konski of Mercer said. "When I saw what it was I really hit the floor. The girl was shooting at the leaders. A couple of shots hit the majority table right in front of me."

All the wounded survived the attack. Fifty years later, the bullet holes can still be inspected in that table.

Why, at the loss of lives and liberty, did the four Puerto Ricans resort to violence?

They considered themselves patriots.

The U.S. had taken the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898 and continued to control it. In 1952, a constitution took effect, establishing a "Free Associated State," still under the control of the U.S., but the Nationalists called for complete independence.

According to the ethic of Lolita Lebron, "conquest and pillage" of one's homeland by a foreign invader justified the use of force to achieve liberation. Lolita and her compatriots wanted to stun what they thought of as an oppressor and draw world attention to the "brutal" nature of U.S. domination in Puerto Rico.

The terrorists were tried and imprisoned until U.S. President Jimmy Carter freed them in 1979, coinciding with Fidel Castro's release of several Americans being held in Cuba.

Now in her eighties, an unrepentant Lolita L., one of two surviving members of the shooters, continues to enjoy prominence among Nationalists, although her politics are more and more muddled. Not only is she subject to cosmic religious visions, Lolita L. has acquired a taste for what she calls, "El Pollo de Kentucky" — Kentucky Fried Chicken, popularly known, in the lingo of the tyrant, as "KFC."

05-03-04

Calkins' Centralia

Down at Joe's place on Cranberry Street, the second Monday in May, with a cuppa whatever, I crack open the "History of Centralia." If you're a neophyte who doesn't know Vine Street, Centralia, from Center Street, Vandalia, listen up.

I'm looking at a copy of seemingly ancient, handwritten notes by someone named Vida Calkins. She says that, in 1836, "Mr. Harris of St. Louis" built a sawmill on the west side of the Wisconsin river in what is now Wisconsin Rapids. The property was sold to Daniel Whitney of Green Bay, a big wheel in the Pinery whose name keeps coming up here. The idea was to cut the big white pines along the river, saw them up, and float the lumber down the river to buyers like Mr. Harris in St. Louis.

The new mill was set at the edge of some 100 acres of dry land bordered by river and swamp. The beginnings of a village consisted of three frame houses for mill workers and the log house of David Baker about where *Daily Tribune* is now.

It was common for the former inhabitants, whether Winnebago, Menominee or Chippewa, to hang out on the high ground, brew a cuppa whatever and talk about the old days, just like we're doing now.

In the middle 1800s, what we call "pioneers" poured in from eastern states, Canada and Europe. For a while, they

got here by way of stagecoach to New Lisbon and on foot the rest of the way north.

Then came the railroad. Pilgrims to the Pinery such as Vida Calkin's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Chas. O. Lemley, arrived at New Lisbon via the new 1857 steam railway and took a four-horse stage 45 miles to Centralia. "From this time on the history of Centralia is very interesting and dear to me as I have lived here all my life," Vida writes.

Lemley, a contractor and builder, helped build the first pulp mill on the Wisconsin river and the first store building (Jackson & Garrison) in "Centralia."

The settlement was named by Henry W. Jackson, who, like the Lemleys, had come from Hinsdale, Mass., in 1857. Undoubtedly, the name was selected for the central location in the state and/or after Centralia, Pa., Centralia, Ill., Centralia, Mo., or Centralia, Iowa. Later, came the most well known, Centralia, Wash.

Though it was a frontier settlement, only the land was wild. The people were as civilized as Easterners. Within a couple of years, they had established: a post office, with Jackson as postmaster; the store of Jackson, Garrison & Worthington; the *Centralia Enterprise* newspaper, founded by C.H. Clark; and a physician's practice, by Dr. Geo. W. Whitney of Maine, followed a couple of years later by Dr. P. Hurley.

About this time, Mr. and Mrs. Rufus E. McFarland located in Centralia. Mrs.

McFarland told Vida Calkins that the McFarland property in downtown Centralia, now the neighborhood of Joe's Place, was used as a camping ground by Indians who kept her awake at night with their "savage" yells. The house was surrounded by dense woods populated by bears, wolves and other wild animals.

After I had written this story, Karen Lamb, 1821 Two Mile Avenue, called to say she had some old papers found in her aunt's Third Street house after the aunt's death. The same Aunt Vida who was the wife of judge Frank Calkins; the Centralia story is one of the things she didn't throw out.

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Forget me not: Sophia Des Jarlais, 90, mother of former *Daily Tribune* editor Bob Des Jarlais. Visiting Sophie in Douglas, AZ, Bob, "the Big Kahuna," and I were a couple seasons past our mid-life crises; but to the old lady, then about 80, we were "adventurous boys" and so we tried to conduct ourselves from then on.

05-10-04

Sampson's

What I know about workin' for a living, I learned from peas.

Early on a Monday morning much like this, sleepy boys at least 16 years old assembled at the tall brick landmark on the east river bank (north of where the swimming pool used to be). Built as a brewery, it was the Sampson Canning Co. factory in the summer of '62. Here, groups of a dozen or so new employees were assigned to pea viners in outlying agricultural areas.

En route to a location north of Vesper, my crew shivered on planks laid across concrete blocks in an open truck bed. Soon, the truck hit a bump, the plank and everyone on it bounced up and, coming down, crunched my metal lunch bucket.

With no gate across the back, gloves, hankies and hats flew off the back, receding from view as the truck continued toward the pea fields. The return trip would likely be made 8-12 hours later.

Work began with the employee standing on a pile of pea vines, pitchfork in hand, encouraging fresh vines into a machine that extracted the peas. If the dumping had been done well, the pile ate itself up. If the vines were tangled, you wrestled with the mess you were at the same time standing on and the viner clunked along empty; or if you pushed too hard, the machine clogged and had to be cleared. As you worked, there were

plenty of pea pitchers around to critique your efforts

After "pitching," you took a turn watching peas fill metal bins that you weighed and dumped for transport to Rapids. Finally, you rested on a wagon tongue, swatting flies with a stick and eyeing puffy clouds drifting over bucolic Wood County. Rain might mean the rest of the day off.

Lunch break was enjoyed in a shady orchard across a country road. This is where I cashed in.

Each morning, I set out from home with three cans of frozen soda pop in my battered, thermos-less lunch box. At noon, two cans were sold for a spicy profit. The third was mine, thawed to a state of sweet satisfaction. Perfect.

The big boss man of our pea field was Ernie Becker, stocky and tough, switch in hand, like he might use it on our lazy city slicker backs. Perfect.

Over by the rotting pea vines: a one-legged, gap-tooth "old codger" on the far side of 50, who spit snooze and spun his false foot. Perfect.

If workin' for a living in the great out of doors satisfied the spirit, hours spent inside the factory during bean season showed the other side of the leguminous life: slavin' for a living. Imperfect.

Shift work on the line: a monotonous standing in place on a concrete floor at a conveyor, sorting cans and packing boxes; regimented breaks on the cool, fragrant bank of the "hardest workin'

river," watching carp jump.

Workin' for a living can kill you, I told one of the eponymous family, Jim Sampson, years later. I had been pushing a massive cooking tub along the rail it hung from, when it slammed to the floor at my feet. The heavy iron hanger barely missed my head and struck my wrist, which puffed up like a golf ball.

Because I hadn't slept, in the morning, I saw Doc Hulme, before reporting to the Sampson secretary that their machinery had jeopardized the future of *River City Memoirs*. She chided me. "Why didn't you come in and get permission before you went to the doctor?"

"That must have been Nona Davis," Jim Sampson laughed.

And from Ms. Davis, the last great benefit of workin' for a living, the living itself. At 95 cents per hour, it added up fast.

Perfect.

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For an interview with Jim's brother and Sampson co-owner, Ray Sampson, see May 2004 *Artifacts*, a quarterly periodical of the South Wood County Historical Corp., 540 Third Street South.

05-17-04

Newton's

It was like old times all over again. Monday morning with Ellen Sabetta in the heart of the old downtown, at "Joe's Place," a.k.a. From the Ground Up coffee house.

Ellen and I first met in 1980 at the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum, 540 Third Street S., where she, then curator, regaled me with many a tale of trouble and triumph in River City.

Also 1980, in the same space where we now occupied a stuffed couch, Ellen began working Friday nights and Saturdays—at Newton's Women's Apparel. According to a 1982 city directory, Newton's was owned by Margaret L. Leist and managed by Dorlese Snyder.

At Newton's, an upscale women's clothing shop, clerks knew their customers' tastes, said Ellen. When something appropriate came in, you'd get on the phone to the customer, "'We've got a dress that kind of looks like you.' It was one of the few stores where you could take things home on approval. If you didn't want it, you brought it back. We also had charge accounts."

Nancy Mortimer, said Ellen, worked in the basement doing alterations. When two women from Third Street expressed interest in the same dress or suit, you might warn her, "Mrs. So-and-so bought that," so the two wouldn't end up at the same bridge table flaunting the same fin-

ery.

On the east wall were displays with sales racks below, carefully watched by the staff. "We kind of knew when Dorlese was taking the last markdown."

Along the west wall and toward the back, an array of sartorial splendor: sweaters, blouses, coats, dresses, lingerie, hosiery, handbags, wallets, gloves, monogrammed handkerchiefs.

Four dressing rooms, sales counter with cash register, one rest room. "The customers used it too and we girls had to keep it clean."

"We had problems that modern-day stores have, like shoplifters. And, people would cut buttons off our coats. How, was beyond me. It was done so slickly, even though there were two girls in the store."

"Many is the time I sat on the floor doing inventory by the cost code," said Ellen. "It was a four-letter thing. Some of them spelled silly words and some didn't. Two of us would shout the cost code and the boss would translate it into the cost on an old manual adding machine."

In 1988, when Ellen left Newton's, it was in part because Rapids Mall, a block or two away, had helped change merchandising in our town. Until the end, "there were still some of the older people that appreciated the kind of service we gave."

For years, Newton's clerks were amused each Christmas Eve as they

waited for the same last gentleman to appear because he inevitably had a large number of packages waiting for him in the basement. By coincidence, the man's widow walked past us that Monday morning in 2004 as Ellen and I reminisced.

"Small town, don't you know," she said.

On Grand Avenue, it seems that way.

Another place Ellen worked was Sampson's canning factory, profiled in last week's *Memoirs*. She started out sorting and snipping on the second-floor, flipping bad beans over one shoulder, then the other, to relieve line-work boredom.

When co-owner Ray Sampson said, "I got a better job for you," Ellen moved to the main floor, where women stuffed beans into cans to be filled with brine and sealed. Wearing a double pair of gloves, Ellen learned to pick up two hot cans in each hand while squeezing a fifth in the middle.

When she had filled the big iron basket, she took her break in the doorway, and, like generations before and after, Ellen enjoyed a whiff of that unique ambience to be found only in River City.

05-24-04

Mead-Witter

When I met with her on a Monday in May 2004, Ellen Sabetta held a poppy she had acquired at the Baker Drive IGA. It reminded her of the 1930s when she stood outside Woolworth's "dime store" on the corner of 3rd and Grand avenues, "with my little poppy basket on my arm."

"Down this block and I guess every other block of the business district of Rapids, there was a hole in the sidewalk where they flew a flag on all flag holidays."

"This block," meaning the Mead-Witter block. Please join Ellen and myself for a figurative perambulation as we revisited the 1940s and 1950s:

●210 W. Grand Ave.—First Bond & Mortgage Co. and Ziegler Insurance (1941). In 1955, Harstad's Shoe Store and Klismet's Toyland.

●212 W. Grand—Fritz & Pete's Billiard Hall, owned by Fritz Hribernik and Pete Sakolosky.

"When I was small," said Ellen, "my father, William Prebbanow, would drag me in and plop me on a stool while he played pool or billiards. In later years, my friends and I would walk down from Lincoln high school. Boys would grab our books and duck in the pool hall because they knew we thought it was horrible to have to go in after them."

● 222—Wilpolt's Restaurant.

"They had a deluxe hamburger called the Aristocrat that had a gob of barbecue

sauce and there might have been a slice of cheese. We always went to Wilpolt's after the movies and I don't know how our dates indicated that, yeah, you could order an Aristocrat. It was maybe fifty cents.

"Harry Wilpolt's wife was a Panter girl, Ramona. She worked in the restaurant in a uniform.

"He probably threw us out regularly because we made a lot of noise and mess for a nickel Coke and the poor waitresses knew they weren't going to get any tips."

●224—Rapids Bakery.

"The best crescents, with a little bit of orange frosting. At one time, it was owned by people named Anderson. I still know Andersons' phone number. The fire department was '1,' my friend Sally Madsen was '2' and Anderson's was '3.' Sheer memory, kiddo."

●230—D&M Beauty Shop.

"I have a photo of me taken with a fresh haircut from there when I was in 5th grade. I got confirmed and immediately after, got my long braids cut. I had my first permanent there in 1939. You were hooked up to a machine. It was heavy and hot. They'd stand and fan you."

●232—Barber shop.

1941: Joe Arnold barber shop. 1955: Fritz Haefner barber shop.

"He always waved."

●240—Abel's Clothes Shop.

"My mother picked out my father's clothes. Bob Patzer's father worked there. He usually waited on us because

my mother didn't like Frank Abel. That's a gazillion years ago."

●242—Western Union Telegraph Co.

"E.J. Wallace was the telegrapher. Dorothy Jaecks and June Flatt worked there."

●244—Anderson's Drugs.

(In 1941, Whitrock pharmacy.)

Operated by Harris and Delbert Anderson, from Frederick, Wis., by way of Madison.

"I worked at the soda shop in the late forties. We had the best ice cream. It came up from Milwaukee on a night train packed in dry ice in those canvas ice cream cans. Everything was hand dipped. I had a tremendous muscle from dipping."

●250—Newton's. See last week's *Memoirs*.

●252—Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co.

"I have some menus and recipes from A&P before they built their own building on 4th Avenue about where the drive-in for the First National (US) Bank is."

●264—F.W. Woolworth Co.

"The first job I ever had, 1941-42, Friday nights and Saturdays. My first rate of pay was 12 cents an hour. I saved enough to buy a black Chesterfield winter coat with a black velvet collar."

05-31-04

Camp Peterson

The city is busy with historians; but you can't be sure where they live until you knock on their door.

When Karen and Darwin Lamb cleaned out the Third Street house of her aunt, Vida Calkins, they found a cache of papers, including Vida's memoirs previously featured here. When someone cleans out the Lamb house at 1821 Two Mile Avenue, they're going to find an equally-valuable trove of history.

"I've got some old pictures," Darwin says.

Pictures and more. During the busy season, he cuts out "this stuff" and lays it aside. Then, in winter, "I do something with it," securing it in 3-ring binders. The result is a display of family photos, newspaper clippings, brochures and memorabilia.

Darwin, born 1934, worked 37 years in the traffic department of CW Transport, a local trucking company that was bought out by Gerber Products Co. in 1988. "Here's a book you can have about their history," Darwin says. He has two.

One of the undated clippings in a scrapbook regards Russell Peterson, who owned a lumber yard at 8th Street and Griffith. "Russ had a small Cessna plane he'd fly around for business. He belonged to this Cessna club; he and his wife would take trips to the Bahamas."

Darwin said he walked into the lumber yard office with his application for a

job in hand when Peterson said, "Come on, I have to get my plane gassed up." So they drove to Peterson's air strip, hopped in the plane and flew down by Friendship. "I actually had my interview in the plane and got hired. I worked there a couple of years in the mid-Fifties as delivery and lumber yard man. He also built houses and I used to go out and help."

The houses stand in the vicinity of Griffith and 9th Street, south of Wal-Mart.

Peterson, said Darwin, was a heavy-set cigar-carrying progressive guy, a go-getter who would swoop in the door on half a run, always doing something. "A good guy to work for. I think I made \$112 every two weeks. Every winter we'd go up north and cut Christmas trees."

On the east end of what is now the 6th or 7th fairway of Ridges golf course were Peterson's hangar, plane and landing strip. "Just before this happened, I went to the airport. His plane battery was going dead so I had it charged," said Darwin. "In the morning, I went to work. I was sitting there waiting for him to open up the doors but he never came.

"So finally a car drove up and Harold Wittman, the manager of the lumber yard, says, 'He won't be here because he got killed in a crash last night.'"

The partial *Tribune* article in Darwin's scrapbook says Peterson, 47, lived at 4721 9th St. S.

At 2 a.m., a resident who lived near Peterson's air field heard noise from the

crash but the downed plane wasn't found until 7:30 a.m. It had clipped the top of oak trees and fell short of the unlighted landing strip.

Like a lot of us, Darwin went out to the airport to see what he could see. I remember looking for the plane as my dad drove what must have been our '49 Pontiac on Griffith Avenue.

Darwin thought some of the land might have been called "Camp Peterson."

And so it probably was. A list of sermons by Rev. Robert W. Kingdon, then of the Wisconsin Rapids Congregational church, according to a web posting by his son, includes "Laws of the Abundant Life," delivered at the "Boy Scout Camp, Camp Peterson," May 15, 1955.

The sermon includes these words:

"A Scout is Cheerful.

"Nobody likes a grouch, and everyone loves a smile. One cheerful face, one pleasant remark, sometimes even one joyous 'wise-crack' can make a whole gang feel better.

"The fellow who is lucky enough to wake in the morning to the sound of his mother's singing, or his father's cheerful call, has his day all oiled and running smoothly by the time he gets his face washed."

06-14-04

Jere Witter

Did Jere Witter fly under the Grand Avenue bridge? Not likely. Did he jump out of an airplane? You bet your life.

Daredevil, banker's son and Consolidated Paper Inc. heir, Jere ("Jerry") Witter was the first local to obtain a private pilot's license.

On Nov. 13, 1929, he wrote "The First Jump" for the *Daily Tribune*.

"My grandmother told me that 'flying machines' were very dangerous because at an altitude of more than 100 feet they were positively uncontrollable and that the pilot was sure to fall ... Naturally, I believed her. I still do to a certain extent."

But there was no problem with anxiety on the big day, because the night before, Witter had "not the feeblest intention of jumping." By the time Witter arrived at the airport at the end of First Street South, Jerry Saunders had rolled out the aviator's plane and was warming it up.

Nepco Airways general manager Capt. Leslie Mulzer asked Witter if he intended to do any acrobatics and Witter said he might be tempted. Only because government regulations required use of a parachute during acrobatics had Witter purchased one. True, he had been impressed two days previous when Bill Graves, Hub Stark and Johnnie Margeson had parachuted. So, maybe...

After a stunt flight, Witter impulsively asked "Cap" Mulzer for permission to jump, saying it would be too bad to take the chute off unused. "So that's how I got myself into the jam. And I couldn't very well back out. I told Sarge Richter that I was nervous as a cat on ice and he said, 'Well, if you are you'd better not jump.' I told him I wasn't as nervous as that."

Witter crawled into the passenger seat of the front cockpit—the first time he had ever been there. Leaving the ground, his last thought was "No ambulance, thank you; just a hearse will do."

"Cap" made a wide circle of the field and headed back into the wind. "Long before there was any necessity of it, he was telling me to get out on the wing." Witter said he bumped his head on the top wing as he struggled out of the unfamiliar front cockpit.

"It isn't a pleasant sensation to stand in propeller wash on the ground without goggles, much less on the wing at 2000 ft. My eyes watered. I crouched down; my left hand on the flying wires, my right on the fuselage as directed."

Witter grasped the rip cord with his right hand, let go with the left and fell off backward. What happened next, he couldn't say for sure but he pulled the rip cord, felt a jerk and was suspended in mid-air.

"To feel myself floating gently wafted by zephyrs and not eight feet underground ... was an exceedingly pleasant sensation."

Coming down, he felt an excess of joy and "monkeyed with" the shroud cords, causing some "oscillation." Then, the landing. "The dear old ground." But I had no idea that it was coming so fast. I think I hit, something like a tractor dropped off the Woolworth building.

"Very gently, I pulled myself together and was most grateful to see Cap's brown Buick coming out. To the boys in the Buick, I intimated that parachute jumping wasn't all beer and skittles, but to the rest at the hangar, I said, 'Just another day ... in the life of a sap.' The last under my breath."

...

Estelle Harcinski, 4711 Ninth St. S., provided the date: Russell Peterson, subject of last week's *Memoirs*, crashed his plane on July 30, 1954.

+++

Forget-me-not

Kathryn Easter, 101, 40-year *Tribune* employee and later South Wood County Historical Corp. board member. Then in her 80s, she asked me if I could fix her smoke alarm, the thing had been peeping for several nights and she couldn't sleep. To buy a battery, all I had to do was walk a few feet to Wal-Mart. Seems Kathryn's house had a good reason to sound an alarm. Its lot was about to become a small part of a big parking lot.

06-21-04

Four Dead In Georgia

The *Tribune* heard about it first. Word came at 2:30 p.m., June 24, 1954, in the form of an Associated Press bulletin. A plane from Wisconsin had crashed in Atlanta, Ga., killing four unidentified occupants. Gasoline for the Beechcraft Bonanza had been purchased in the name of D.L. Jensen, of "Stevens Point."

The *Tribune* knew D.L. Jensen and his family, actually of Wisconsin Rapids, and made the telephone call that provided the names of his companions. Confirmation came when Mrs. Calfern Walker received a call from an Atlanta funeral home that also placed calls to families of other victims.

Mrs. Clara Schroeder heard about the death of her husband in a radio broadcast while at a Wisconsin Rapids beauty shop. Overcome by shock, she was taken by shop attendants to a physician's office.

"Trapped in the flaming wreckage of a private plane, four prominent Wisconsin Rapids businessmen perished at Atlanta, Ga., Tuesday afternoon when the aircraft crashed and burned on an attempted takeoff from the Atlanta municipal airport." The single-engine, four-place plane could not gain altitude and one of its wings clipped a tree at the edge of the airfield, bursting into flames a few feet from a house.

The news gripped local people with a sense of "numbing shock and grievous sorrow."

Seldom has our community experienced such shocking and saddening news, said the *Tribune*. Each victim occupied a place of importance in the business life of this community. Each was held in high regard by a wide circle of business acquaintances and close personal friends.

Four dead:

●Delbert L. Jensen, 36.

The pilot. His family came from Fargo, N.D., when he was nine months old. The LHS grad, an Army Air Corp pilot in WWII, was a partner with his father in the L.E. Jensen garage.

He had established Krista Enterprises, named for his daughter, with Charles M. Amann, about two years previous. They built a hangar at Stevens Point.

With his wife, the former Roberta Houston of Green Bay, and three daughters, he resided at 640 3rd Ave. S.

●Harry W. Walker, 60.

The Whitewater native and WWI Army pilot worked here 1926-32 as a bank examiner. At the time of his 1948 retirement, he was stationed in Minneapolis. In that year, he became vice-president of the First National Bank.

Walker's father had been superintendent of the Wisconsin State School for the Deaf in Delavan.

With his wife, the former Calfern Chamberlain (married here), and daughter, he lived at 611 10th Ave. S.

●Ernest A. Schroeder, 61.

Born in Owen, for 23 years connected with Cities Service Oil Co., he operated Schroeder Trucking Co. from 1941 until

his retirement in 1953 and continued to own it. With his wife, the former Clara Rusch (married in Withee), he lived at 130 10th St. S.

●Ray J. Melville, 54.

The Chippewa Falls native worked on construction for Consolidated 1928-31, returned in 1938 and enlisted in the Army in 1942.

In 1945, he came back and organized the Wisconsin Valley Concrete Products Co. of which he was president. Melville, who had lived on Chestnut Street, was a bachelor.

The four were en route to Jesup, Ga., to attend the grand opening of a new paper mill on which Schroeder's son-in-law, Ralph Kutchera, formerly of Wisconsin Rapids, was construction engineer.

Kutchera had been an engineer for Consolidated here and an associate of Melville in the concrete business.

The party left Wisconsin Rapids by car about 4:30 a.m. the same morning, drove to Stevens Point airport, taking off in the plane owned by Jensen and Charles Amann, president of the Farmers & Merchants State Bank, Rudolph.

The flight to Jesup would have been the last leg.

Said the *Tribune*, "Words are feeble things with which to express the feelings of the many who knew and admired these four fine citizens and neighbors."

06-28-04

Sesquicentennial

What could be more maddening than digging a hole in Rudolph muck? The more you dig, the more it collapses around you, like something just poured out of a cement truck. All the more credit to my neighbor and Rudolph town chairman, Al Herzberg. On a day much like today, he got up from an easy chair to help shovel and bail for long hours, trying to get down to a leaking well connection.

So when he asked me to speak to a meeting of town officials at the Rudolph town hall, I dug deep and laid it on thick.

"Gentlemen and ladies, prepare your town clerk's records," I told the presiding officer, Tom Buss of Grand Rapids, and dignitaries assembled from the five corners of Wood County. "Gather your atlases and history books. Convene genealogists and scholars. Call Mike Goc at New Past Press for a commemorative book. E-mail editor Treinen at the *Daily Tribune*. Send Wausau TV your press releases. Look up "sesquicentennial" in the dictionary and prepare for the tidal wave as celebrations of 150th anniversaries roll out."

A lot of us are still around who remember the big Wood County centennial celebration in 1956. Some of us tried to grow beards; in this case, at 10 years old, I wasn't one of us. Now, 50 more years have passed.

Consider [2004] these dates in which the following were established;

Wood County, 1856: The year-and-a-half until its big date is, in municipal terms, the blink of an eye.

Town of Grand Rapids, 1856: When Wood County was founded, Grand Rapids was the only political township. It retains the former name of Wisconsin Rapids.

Town of Rudolph, 1856: At the first meeting of the Wood County board of supervisors, a petition to establish the town was considered, says Robert Rudolph (no relation) in "Wood County Place Names."

Town of Saratoga, 1857: According to *The History of Wood County*, the town was founded at Henry Kennedy's tavern on the Ten Mile Creek.

Town of Seneca, 1857: Seneca was first named Hemlock. Like Saratoga, it was (in 1861) named for New York state locales.

Town of Centralia, 1857: once, the entire countryside west of the river. As population grew, new towns were parceled out until, in 1875, Centralia as a township ceased to exist. As a city, it joined Grand Rapids in 1900.

Town of Dexter, 1858: Supposedly named after a mule belonging to George Hiles. Taken over by the town of Hiles in 1884 until 1901, when Dexter was split from Hiles.

The following four townships, formed during the Civil War, took representa-

tive names.

Lincoln, 1861.

Springfield, 1861: Vacated in 1865 and attached to McClellan.

McClellan, 1864: Made up of the present towns of Remington, Hiles, Cary and Dexter. Reorganized and vacated in 1865.

Sigel, 1863: Named for Franz Sigel, a brigadier general in the Union Army.

Sesquicentennials for the remainder of the towns will come around so late someone else will have to do the dancing:

Remington, 1868; Wood, 1874; Auburndale, 1874; Marshfield, 1875; Rock, 1878, Richfield, 1881; Milladore, 1882 (originally called Mill Creek).

Sherry, 1885; Hansen (first established under the name of Vesper in 1885); Cary, 1901 (established by George Hiles near his granite quarry); Arpin, 1901 (successor of the town of Vesper); Cameron, 1903; and Cranmoor, 1903.

For more on that unique assemblage of cranberry growers, see the centennial history, *Cranmoor: The Cranberry Eldorado* by yours truly.

After the towns come the villages, cities, churches, schools, clubs and an odd sesquicentenarian, all needing some recognition.

07-05-04

Inside Job

The scene of the crime was convenient. Wisconsin Rapids chief of police R.J. Exner walked two blocks from his office at the “old” City Hall, 441 W. Grand Ave., and crossed the street.

It had happened the previous night, June 23, 1954, in premises sometimes called in this column, “Joe’s Place.” Parties unknown, “who apparently knew the store by heart,” stole about \$1,500 worth of dresses from Newton’s women’s apparel shop at 250 W. Grand Avenue (now From the Ground Up coffee house).

Mrs. Margaret Leist, the proprietor, said the stock of “better dresses” in a basement display room was almost completely cleaned out. Forty items, valued at from \$30 to \$50 each, were taken.

Mrs. Patricia Biot, an employee, discovered the theft when she, in response to a telephone call, went to the basement to look for a dress.

But Chief Exner could find no evidence of a break in. Curiously, all the doors had been found locked when the staff arrived in the morning. Maybe the thief or thieves entered the store before it closed Wednesday evening and hid until night fell.

Exner told reporters his investigation failed to turn up evidence of unusual activity around the store during the night. His officers were attempting to contact employees of an all-night restaurant

across the street, probably the Quick Lunch, to learn if they had seen “anything out of the ordinary.”

A statewide alarm was broadcast, presumably in hopes of alerting potential buyers of the hot skirts.

Mrs. Leist said she believed the burglary was committed by someone who had been in the shop often enough to memorize the locations of the more valuable merchandise, possible hiding places and exits.

●A campground on the Four Mile Creek was alluded to in the June 14, 2004, “Memoirs” that featured Darwin Lamb’s recollections. Now, the June 21, 1954, *Tribune* provides details on the project, which was being developed fifty years ago.

According to the 1954 *Tribune*, Lamb’s employer, Russell Peterson, a lumber yard owner and pilot, had signed a 10-year lease to Boy Scout Troop 72 of Wisconsin Rapids.

It allowed the Scouts to use 64 acres of land bounded on the north by Peterson’s air strip and on the south by the Four Mile Creek. The property would later become part of Ridges golf course.

The Scouts had paid a nominal fee and the lease was renewable as long as the camp was operated to the best interests of all concerned. Scoutmaster Lloyd Klinger said the primary objective of “Camp Peterson” would be to follow the Scout program of outdoor activity and appreciation of nature. Two thousand white pine and jack pine trees had been

planted that May. Extended forestry development was expected, in accordance with Peterson’s plans for the area. “Making it especially attractive is the fact that just about every species of tree common to Wisconsin, with the exception of yellow birch, grows in the area,” said the *Tribune*.

Eight fireplaces and camping areas were almost ready, one for each patrol and one for troop executives. Klinger said plans called for a general campfire area so a Scout court of honor and other programs could be held that summer.

Swimming areas were expected to be developed in the Four Mile Creek.

The camp was meant primarily for the use of Troop 72, although other troops with Explorer leaders could use the facilities when certain improvements had been completed.

Affairs of Camp Peterson were handled by trustees Larry Chambers and Henry Baldwin. Morgan Midthun and William S. Grimes were assistant scoutmasters.

Plans changed on July 30, when Peterson died in a crash at his airfield. The future of Camp Peterson as a recreation and learning center for Boy Scouts was suddenly in jeopardy.

07-12-04

Two Mile Landmark

Something about that log-look building suggests times past on Highway 13. From Two Mile School in the 1950s, I used to look at it every day and wonder about goings on there. Clearly, it was more than a residence.

A lot of us have noticed lately that the two-story structure at 3610 8th St. S. is for sale by its owner, Terry Wolfe Realty.

In the late 1930s, it was called the Chatter Bar, operated by Chet Swarick, 26-year-old son of established tavernist Frank Swarick. Chet and his wife lived upstairs in the 8th Street building.

Food was featured downstairs at the Chatter Bar, said Chet's cousin, George Swarick, 1351 Wisconsin River Dr., Port Edwards, because Chet's mother, Kate, was an able cook, specializing in chicken and fish. "They had a good business," George said.

After a couple years, the Swaricks left the semi-rural location. "He had a chance to go downtown," said George, referring to a West Side location "across from the old Central Hotel where his dad was. He was in there quite a while. Guess he called it the Grand Avenue Tap."

A 1941 city directory lists the Chatter Bar at 3610 8th St. S. in the name of Chet Swarick, who is also a resident of Route 3.

About this time, Swarick sold the Chatter Bar to William J. Radomski, who, like Chet, would live upstairs with his wife. A son, William A. Radomski, lived in a house built next door on Two Mile Avenue, said George Swarick, who worked with the elder Radomski at Preway after Radomski left the tavern business behind.

"We used to make oven doors for gas ranges. He made the doors and I made the panels down below for the grill," said George. "He was a good guy, a happy-go-lucky joker."

David Rucinski, 469 Sparks Ave., long-time resident of the neighborhood, said it was a typical bar with a dining room in back. Born in 1930, Rucinski stopped by with his pals, Tom Gray and Ben Eggan. "They used to have chicken," he said, "but they never served the wings; nobody ate the wings. They saved them for neighbor kids."

Don Knuth, 140 Canal St., peddled *Daily Tribunes* by auto on a tube route in 1939-40, coming up from the intersection of State Highways 73 and 13, called Smoky Joe's Corner. The tavern was one of the last stops.

It was owned, he said, by Bill Radomski, whose wife tended bar. "It was a pretty nice little tavern. It had a bar, a couple tables. I don't know of any food."

According to his obituary, William J. Radomski, a Chicago native, 73, died at his 3610 8th Street home, Feb. 27, 1966.

He had married Edith Zimmerman at Kellner in 1919 and moved to Portage county.

In 1930, they moved to Rapids. Apparently, he had been a Wood County deputy sheriff. An Army sergeant in World War I, he was employed at Preway until 1958, when he became a court bailiff, retiring in 1964.

Radomski was a charter member of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, where he sang in the choir.

When William's wife, Edith, 71, died Jan. 6, 1968, her address was 3610 8th St. S.

She was survived by one son, William, later of Longview, Washington, and two daughters, Mrs. Howard (Laura) Henry and Mrs. Robert Patzer. Julia "Susie" Patzer died June 11 of this year.

Knuth noted that, in the days of the Chatter Bar, there was still farmland surrounding 8th Street, which, at Two Mile Avenue changed its identity to "Highway 13."

One of the land owners was Julius Nelson, a farmer from Sigel whose daughter had married Knuth's uncle. Nelson had some advice for Knuth's dad, Clarence, "Why don't you buy farm land on 8th Street. It's going to be the coming thing."

And so it was. But, like so many similar opportunities, who had the cash when it would have done the most good?

07-19-04

9/11 Reminders

NEW YORK – It began as a normal morning something like this until something happened. At my town of Rudolph residence, my brother, Ken, was visiting from Bellingham, Wash. “You’ll want to see this,” I said. “A plane hit the World Trade Center in New York.”

On “Good Morning America,” Charles Gibson, broadcasting from the ABC studio in Mid-Town Manhattan, tried to find out more. The normally affable Gibson, watching a monitor, was stunned when a second plane smashed into the second tower. By telephone, he tried to get information from bystanders as smoke streamed out of the building. Can it really be a second plane? Is this an attack?

On another channel, Bryant Gumbel interrupted for a special report. “We understand that there has been a plane crash at the southern tip of Manhattan. We don’t know if it’s a commercial aircraft. We don’t know if it’s a private aircraft.”

A few minutes later, from an eyewitness on the phone: “Oh, there’s another one! Another plane just hit! That definitely looks like it was on purpose.” As we watched, Gumbel was visibly shaken. “Why do you say that was definitely on purpose?”

In July of this year, with former Rapids resident Jim Nuhlicek, my family and I visited the New York state museum at Rockefeller Plaza in Alba-

ny, the capital city. An exhibit at Albany featured the film “9/11” by French brothers Jules and Gedeon Naudet. It was originally planned as a profile of a firefighter trainee at Duane Street firehouse, located seven blocks from the World Trade Center.

Hearing a roar, Jules Naudet turned his camera upward to catch the first plane coming in. Filming continued until the towers collapsed in a storm of debris that covered the city, threatening the lives of the photographers themselves.

Outside the small viewing room in the Albany museum, the homage to 9/11 continued. A burned-out fire truck in which several firemen had been killed stood among other twisted relics retrieved from Fresh Kills landfill.

The following day, my wife, daughter and I entered New York City by stairs up from Penn Station—under the site of this year’s Republican convention at Madison Square Garden, considered a prime target for terrorists. We were soon tourists, inside the Empire State Building, queued for a long hour-and-a-half in hallways under repair, looking as though they had already been hit.

Not so many blocks to the south waited Ground Zero, the site of the former trade center, where in the unremitting glare of high noon, visitors studied “before and after” displays. Surrounding “skyscrapers,” some being rebuilt, looked tall but had been dwarfed by the twin towers. Just across the street, St.

Paul’s Chapel, 1766, the oldest public building in continuous use on the island of Manhattan. In the ancient cemetery could be viewed the stump of a tree destroyed by flying iron from the Trade Center.

St. Paul’s had functioned as an oasis after the attack. A pew once used by George Washington hosted foot massages for recovery workers. On the day of our visit, a chorus of teens from “Sulphur Springs” sang inspirational Christian songs.

So it happened or didn’t happen on July 9, 2004: another in a series of bright, sunny days in the city.

On “Good Morning America,” the same Charles Gibson who had brought the news of 9/11, spoke cheerfully to tourists in Bryant Park, a few blocks from Times Square and adjacent to a New York public library that houses a Gutenberg Bible and an original handwritten Declaration of Independence. Gibson was happy to welcome us to a performance of the “Grammy-winning” pop group, “Train,” which performed something from the sound track of “Spider-Man 2.”

The song was titled, “Ordinary.” According to singer Pat Monahan, it was inspired by Spider-Man’s struggle to have a normal life while fighting evil. For most of us, the normal life comes naturally. It’s the superhero thing that can be a problem.

07-26-04

Clara

Recently, at her 1400 River Run home, Clara Freund recited some words from long ago.

*In the center of Wisconsin,
Where the giant trees once stood,
Oh, they carved a splendid county
And of course they named it Wood.*

“My folks were so in love with Wood County, I learned a poem about it,” she said. That was in fifth grade at Lone Maple school. “It was far enough so the folks had to take us. Dad built a regular little cabin and we had a horse that hauled us to school. We put hot stones in for the winter to keep our feet warm.”

Clara, 96, was one of 13 children born to Henry and Anna Casper, who had bought “80 acres of standing timber, the lake and the babbling brook for \$900” in the town of Sherry.

The Casper home, three miles south of Milladore, became a center of activity when Clara’s father converted the living room to a saloon and built an ice house nearby to make cold beer possible. Henry also constructed a big merry-go-round.

“They had a donkey in the center to pull it around. Sometimes the donkey would get real stubborn and wouldn’t move so they had to get a pony. I guess the way Mom tells me, they always charged five cents a ride for each person.”

Henry also ran a dance hall on the farm. “My dad was a violinist. He had a real good violin that his parents had brought back from Germany.” Casper played with the Reidels from up the road, an orchestra consisting of a drummer and an accordionist.

In 1918, when Prohibition took effect, the dance hall closed. “There was a nice bar, and a big back bar with mirrors all around. I remember it at the auction where they sold all that stuff,” Clara said.

She and her family attended Catholic church in Rudolph. At “religious school,” the students helped Rev. Philip J. Wagner break up bottles and bake them in a kiln “for the Grotto.”

Wagner also drove country roads with his car to pick up Clara and other pupils. “We walked six miles home every night,” she said. “He was a wonderful priest but we were scared we might say something wrong and get punished.”

Clara said she became “the farmer’s daughter that met the merchant’s son and got married,” a reference to Elmer Dassow, who, with his father, ran a grocery and feed store in Vesper. “We had groceries and 60 meat lockers. We sold dry goods, material, notions. Work there? Sure I did. We had different ones that helped out between the children.”

Where was it? “In the middle of Vesper!”

Across the way were George Horn’s hardware and Zieher’s tavern. Nick

Zieher and Margaret, his wife, were close friends of Clara’s.

On “the other side,” Elmer Klawitter’s meat market. There was Dunn’s grocery store and Bean’s grocery store. And Doc Whitehorn.

Doc Hartsough was the veterinarian. And Pagel, he had the shoe store. Then there was Woodruff. They had the lumber.

Elmer and Clara ran the store until 1950, when they sold to “Chicago people” “but it came back and another person bought it but they couldn’t take care of it and it came back again so we tore it down.”

After Elmer’s death, Clara came to Rapids, where she worked six-and-a-half years at Wood County infirmary and five years at Riverview Hospital, prior to marrying Vincent Freund of Rudolph who died in 2000.

Her verse continues:

*So now would you come with me
To the county I love best?
This county in Wisconsin
With milk and honey blessed—
Hurrah for Wood County!*

For the complete interview see *Artifacts* for August 2004, published four times a year by the South Wood County Historical Corp. and available at the SWCHC Museum, 540 Third Street South.

08-09-04

Consoberries

Consolidated. Cranberries. The “two Cs” that spread the fame of “the Rapids” throughout the nation. So said Max T. Nelson in a Milwaukee newspaper of Sept. 21, 1952, provided by Gale Jackson, 5561 Victorian Way, Wisconsin Rapids.

Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., later Consolidated Papers, Inc., was the predecessor here of Stora Enso North America. Its original mill had been constructed in 1904. The locally-founded company achieved “a series of fascinating chapters”: paper making, power development, flood control, civic mindedness and philanthropy, said Nelson.

Consolidated also provided the “No. 1 citizen” of Rapids, George W. Mead, whose son, Stanton Mead, headed the company. The high school (present East Jr. High), athletic field and fieldhouse were built in 1931 during Mead’s tenure as mayor. Mead had also made Consolidated the principal support of the latest addition to Riverview hospital. Beautification of the downtown riverfront was supported by Mead and his brother-in-law, Isaac Witter. Consolidated’s “motelized” hotel, the Mead, was a little over a year old.

Consolidated was a national leader in making paper “enameled simultaneously on both sides,” a product used by *Life*, *Time*, *Fortune*, *Popular Science*, *Parents*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Newsweek* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Consolidated’s 2,700 em-

ployees made up more than half the city labor force.

As for cranberries, “Wisconsin Rapids” was second only to the state of Massachusetts, said Nelson. Three co-operatives here marketed 25 per cent of the nation’s crop, about a quarter-million barrels in 1951. Fresh berries were sold under the “Eatmor” label of the Wisconsin Cranberry and Midwest Cranberry Sales companies and under “Indian Trail” from Cranberry Growers, Inc. Together they represented more than 200 growers.

Cranberries gave the community its most notable civic social event, the National Cranboree, in late September, at which visitors enjoyed 2,500 free cranberry pies.

The second largest employer in Rapids was the Prentiss Wabers Products Co., with 800 workers. It had been started, said Nelson, by a couple of campers unable to get dry firewood. The result was a manufacturer of electric and gas cooking stoves, oil space heaters and furnaces, camp stoves, picnic ice boxes and parts. The balance of production filled government contracts. Most of its products were marketed under the Preway trademark.

Other employers were Sampson Canning Co., with 400 seasonal workers and Harvard Clothes, Inc., a men’s clothing manufacturer with a payroll of 110.

An important retail trades center, the city of 13,496 was served by the First National and Wood County National banks.

There was no single dominant ethnic or cultural group. About a third of the residents were Catholic. There were 19 churches in all.

The Wisconsin Rapids White Sox played in Class D of the Wisconsin State Baseball League. Locals were proud of their high school teams, having recently won a state championship in basketball.

A 40-member municipal band was more than 50 years old; many locals enjoyed their Barber Shop quartet.

Mayor Carl C. Knudsen, 63, a retired business man who had been elected alderman in 1946 and mayor in 1948 on a platform of raising taxes to cut the city debt, was determined to run the city “like a business” and/or “like a household.” Looking to the future, a fund was earmarked for schools and other civic improvements. First on the list was another bridge across the Wisconsin river.

Nelson noted that the city was without any public transportation aside from taxicabs “although no one in town seems overly concerned.”

The adjoining Town of Grand Rapids (pop. about 4,000) “wanted in” but the city wasn’t interested. Mayor Knudsen believed the expense of the additional “wardage” would be greater than the revenue from it.

In the 20 years previous, River City had enjoyed a rate of population growth second only to Madison, the state capital, making the future so bright you needed Venetian blinds.

08-16-04

Eileen

You didn't have a lot; but it didn't take a lot to have a good time way back when. Way back in the Fifties when payday came every two weeks and, to celebrate, you bought a big bottle of soda. When you got home, the kids had the glasses lined up. You poured and they stood right there to see that each one got their fair share. For fun, you went for a ride. If it wasn't payday, you dodged the root beer stands so the kids wouldn't beg for an ice cream cone.

Way back, when Eileen Keating, 81 [2004], 911 Two Mile Ave., and her husband Duane, were good friends of my parents, Don and Sally Engel, and the children were playmates too.

Duane and Eileen had four: Sherry (1941), David (1942), Diane (1946) and Scott (1949).

Don and Sally had the same number with one match and some close hits: David (1945), Kathryn (1946), Gary (1950) and Kenneth (1955).

Young families lived in little houses they were building themselves on Clyde Avenue. The bathroom fixtures you couldn't afford weren't available anyway so out of four doors you made an outhouse you had to back into.

For fun, you walked the Avenue (Clyde) and met the neighbors: Keatings; Engels; Lawrence and Audrey Carrel; Norman and Beverly Nordlee; Jack and Eleanor Bessey.

For parties, you made do. Carrells had a little house with a stone basement. "We'd get it all straightened around, hang balloons," said Eileen. "We had our pot luck dinner down there."

"The men liked a beer. With five couples, we might have one six pack for them to share. I played the piano; your mother played the piano. We sang. We made our own fun."

You went camping in canvas tents that invariably leaked when it invariably rained. Out by the lake, you sang some more, the old songs.

Like my parents, Keatings were among the many post-World War II arrivals here. A machinist, Duane first worked for Four Wheel Drive, Clintonville. "Then the shipyards exploded with the war and we went to Sturgeon Bay."

In 1944, Duane went down to join the Navy but ended up in the Army for two years and some months. After the war, he got a job at a Green Bay paper converting company but wasn't happy there. Then his cousin, Bud Shambeau offered Duane a job at an 8th Street South welding shop; Duane could get into the little places Bud couldn't. But it wasn't the answer.

So a 1948 interview with Leo Barrette at Consolidated [Water Power & Paper Co.] for a machinist job meant a lot. Unfortunately, Duane got a bad case of chicken pox and was quarantined. It was a chance that couldn't be

missed so Eileen showed up instead.

Barrette thanked her. "You tell him to come as soon as he's well." Duane did so and he got the job that meant a lifetime of security.

Learning of an opening for welders, Duane told his neighbor, Don Engel, a trained welder who was working for the Frank Garber industrial supply company. So Don went down to talk to Barrette and that's how my family's association with Consolidated began.

"What was my dad like in those days?" I asked Eileen.

"Don was fun, always kind of teasing," she said. "Of course, he was a farm boy and your mother was a farm girl and I wasn't brought up on a farm; but I wanted cucumbers. I didn't know you probably could put three seeds in. I dumped half a package in each. Your dad never forgot that.

"Sally was so thoughtful and so giving. I don't believe she ever said a bad word about anybody.

"You were a quiet little guy. A lot of times you'd be by your mom with your arm around her neck. Seems to me all of you were quiet. Maybe thinkers, huh, even then?"

08-30-04

Rapids 1977

On August 16, 2004, “River City 1952” was portrayed in these pages as a vigorous community growing toward its prime. Almost midway between 1952 and now came a 1977 story by John T. Wells in the *Milwaukee Journal*. Wells celebrated a contented Mediapolis here that sensed only a whiff of what was blowing in the wind.

Like most observers, the journalist focused on the hard-working Wisconsin River as central to the Rapids identity. “Born as a trickle in the tamarack swamps of Oneida County, the river becomes a giant as it works its way southward for about 450 miles to its outlet in the Mississippi river.”

Hydraulic power brought progress for communities along its banks: as true in 1977, said Wells, as it was in the 1880s when the first pulp and paper mills were built.

Wells dutifully gave a nod to George W. Mead. After the original planners both died, Mead had, in 1903, assumed responsibility for building a dam and paper mill.

Mead’s Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., was, at the time of the 1977 story, the world’s largest producer of enamel printing papers. At its Wisconsin mills, it employed about 4,900, three fourths of whom lived in Wisconsin Rapids area. Consolidated influenced everyone in the city of about 18,500 (up from 13,000-plus in 1952).

How did such a dominant corporation avoid turning a small city into a

company town? Glenn Anderson, Consolidated public information manager, credited a low key approach to community relations. They were “willing to help” but “would not push.”

On a personal level, the relationship between company and employees was a lasting one, said Wells of the *Journal*. He cited a conversation with Don , a recent retiree, who said, “It’s a wonderful place to work.” Good pay, good benefits and a good retirement program were part of the explanation.

As he traveled about River City, Wells said, he was often greeted by persons he had never seen before. The topic of conversation tended to be hunting.

Part of the relaxed atmosphere, he said, “may be due to the river and the abundant parkland that borders it.” You could stroll for miles and never bump into buildings, marinas or warehouses. For the riverbank parks, “ever changing and ever beautiful,” Wells credited past and present planners.

Pollution had “sullied” the river somewhat but it was getting better all the time, with Consolidated playing a role in the cleanup. A new \$8.6 million water quality center brought the company into compliance with 1977 pollution standards.

Residentially, Wells found a pleasant blend. One of the old mansions lining “the bluff” on the east side of the river (3rd Street South) was a museum operated by the South Wood County Historical Corp., not far from the new and modern McMillan Memorial Library, which he found “an architecturally in-

teresting building.”

The downtown straddling the river was unusual in that there were no vacant stores, “though some of them need remodeling.” A planned downtown shopping mall, then a somewhat novel idea, would bring a new look. About 40 stores were proposed. Also coming was a new “triangular” City Hall.

Already enhancing the downtown on each street corner were planters of brightly-colored petunias. Where parking lots had been built, “room has been spared for trees and shrubbery,” Wells said.

Like most Wisconsin communities, development sprawled out along the major highways. “Here, on Highway 13, entering the city from the south, there is a long formation of fast food restaurants, motels, car dealers, small shopping centers and other businesses.

“Unlike many communities, nobody seems in a rush to get places. The speed limit along Highway 13 to the south is 35 m.p.h., but the traffic moves at a leisurely 25 m.p.h.”

According to the correspondent from Milwaukee, that’s the way it was in River City. Why be in such a big hurry to get somewhere else when we were doing so well right at home?

09-06-04

Marsh Harvest

Send out the photographers; it's harvest time on the marshes. The modern cranberry highway and the "Eldorado" of 19th-Century chroniclers come to life.

I have long favored cranberry country. In my piscatory youth, my dad took me to the ditches, where even I could snare the snaky cran-pike, so crazy for "Daredevles." The biggest "lunker" shook off the red-and-white spoon and slipped away into the tamaracks; yet I later boasted to my younger pal, Bruce Zanow, that I had hooked a "28-inch northern."

Cranberries, centered in the town of Cranmoor, are the signature product of our landscape. At Bowlmor, you can't sneeze without dislodging an Ocean Spray baseball cap from someone.

Traditionally, cranberries were for Thanksgiving. At Grandpa's farm, the holiday centerpiece was a deep-red cylinder of jell that held the contours of the can indefinitely. When relatives visited us, we drove out to the blessed lonesomeness of big sky and desolate swamp that contrasted with neatly geometric cultivated beds.

In the 1950s, clusters of colorful buildings remained from the storied seasons when crowds of pickers and rakers assembled for work and play.

If you were a grower yourself, you could afford fancy restaurants like "the Mead" or Wilbern's, where they served special-recipe cran-bread and cranberry juice cocktails.

In my own green years, I knew the

lucrative fruit was associated with our Two Mile Avenue neighbors, the Murgatroyds, through Auril M.'s mother, Lela Winn, who later shared her reminiscences.

I watched one Cranboree parade from John Murgatroyd's second floor office on West Grand Avenue, where I knocked over a bottle of ink, almost as embarrassing as some of the ink I spilled later.

In the early 1960s, Wayne Dempze of the Biron cranberry family and I played high school cornet. After a pep band gig, his car stalled on the far side of the marsh and we had to trudge frozen beds against a bitter north wind, wearing flimsy trench coats, and, for vanity, no headgear. About that time, at a clearing where berries had been dumped during the cancer scare, a warden interrupted a private social gathering I attended by inviting me and my parents to meet with the sheriff at the courthouse. Thus, a cranecdote for the future!

Around 1970, Jon Gottschalk, a hereditary Cranmoor grower of my generation, happened to stop at the Brig pub in the basement of the Dixon Hotel. He said he would likely be up all night watching for frost. Kind of different, I thought, for a young guy. Many of us were still goofing off.

My introduction to Cranmoor history writing came when Lela Winn asked me to help with an early draft of her 1981 book, "The Marsh."

After my 1980 debut at the *Daily Tribune*, Newell and Helen Jasperson shared the picaresque tales of Newell's grandfather, Sherman Whittlesey, one of

the first to arrive at what he called the "cranberry Eldorado."

Soon, cranberry marshes became century farms and I interviewed Chuck Bennett about his family's long Cranmoor history. Long-time Potter Bros. stalwart Hank Westfall described long nights on dikes and Clarence Searles talked about his family history and the Arpin-Brazeau marsh.

I was getting to be a cranberry nut.

Soon, the papers of T.E. Nash, founder of the Nekoosa paper mill, documented his exploits with big-name Madison pal William F. Vilas. Their Cranmoor-area marsh crashed in the flaming 1890s.

Each year, the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Rapids, asks me to profile the summer meeting host in booklet form, allowing me to stay up-to-date on the always colorful, often entertaining saga. Last spring, through the inspiration of "cran-kid" grower and town clerk Phil Brown, I published "Cranmoor: The Cranberry Eldorado" a book-length centennial history.

It's all about the berries.

09-13-04

Lincoln

For decades after his death, oratory blossomed forth across the land on February 12 because it was Abraham Lincoln's birthday; but the "greatest President" was once just another candidate.

A 1929 *Daily Tribune* (provided by Gale Jackson, Wisconsin Rapids) said that "the best" Lincoln birthday speech had been delivered to students of Wood County Normal, our local teachers college. The reminiscence "came from the lips" of a witness to the Freeport, Ill., Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858.

At Wisconsin Rapids, the event began with community singing. Kathryn Jole, musical director of the Normal school chose the Civil War songs, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Tenting Tonight on the Old Camp Ground."

The speaker was introduced by school superintendent A.W. Zellmer: W.J. Fisher, Civil War veteran, for many years a Rapids resident. Fischer, 84, said he hadn't prepared a speech but was just going to talk.

"Men like Lincoln never die," Fisher said. "His physical form might pass on, but the things he did, the things he thought and the ideas which he strived to fulfill will never die. As long as the English language is spoken and as long as America exists, the name and works of Lincoln will never be forgotten."

Fisher, whose family had lived about fifty miles south of Freeport, said, "I was one of the happiest boys in the world when my father offered to take me with

him. That was in September [probably August] and I was going to be 14 years old the following November."

Debates between Stephen A. Douglas, the Democratic incumbent Illinois U.S. senator, and Lincoln, a relative unknown, were held in each of seven Congressional Districts during the 1858 campaign for a U.S. Senate seat from Illinois.

"The debate was on the Missouri Compromise," Fisher told the assemblage at Wood County Normal, "which had been passed in the senate just shortly before and the question was, squatter sovereignty or freedom? Lincoln, of course, stood for the latter."

To an immense outdoor crowd, Douglas spoke first, said Fisher.

Lincoln, who took the stand with a sad, sober face, wasn't attractive, according to the account.

His coat hung carelessly about broad shoulders, his sleeves were far too short for his arms and his vest was a mass of wrinkles. Lincoln's prospects did not look favorable.

But the candidate met the challenge with stories and jokes, Fisher said, and had the crowd laughing and cheering as his high-keyed voice "penetrated to the outermost edges of that enormous gathering."

"He had the most expressive countenance I had ever seen. With that expression and his words he could sway that mighty audience, I might say he had possession of the crowd."

The self-styled backwoods lawyer related the wrongs being done to the

slaves, the cruelty with which they were treated and the suffering they were experiencing until there was hardly a dry eye in that crowd, said Fisher. "Then he told of the duty of men as he saw it, with a voice that rang out like a trumpet call, and he won."

According to a Douglas/Lincoln website, Lincoln explained that he would speak for one hour, Douglas for an hour and a half and then Lincoln for half an hour, a total of three hours.

A few words from Douglas may put Lincoln's position in perspective. "All I have to say of it is this, that if you, Black Republicans, think that the negro ought to be on a social equality with your wives and daughters, and ride in a carriage with your wife, whilst you drive the team you...have a right to entertain those opinions, and of course will vote for Mr. Lincoln."

In response, members of the Freeport rabble supposedly shouted, "Down with the negro," "No, no, etc."

Lincoln lost the election but the debates launched him into national prominence and led to his election a couple years later as the first Republican President of the United States.

10-04-04

Cranboree

Fifty years ago, this was a city of 80,000. For a day or two, anyway. According to the *Daily Tribune*, normally tranquil Wisconsin Rapids “became a scene of marvelous wonders for a brief moment Sunday afternoon, with pilgrims by the thousands coming to glory in the magic of the National Cranboree.”

The official estimate of 80,000 attendees was low, if anything, said a balloonist who viewed the scene from above.

If the crowd were the largest in the “extravagant” six-year history of the local celebration, so was the parade. “Without a doubt it was the greatest free attraction offered anywhere in the state,” said the *Tribune*.

The 1954 Cranboree took place the weekend of Friday, Sept. 17, through that Sunday. It began with a Kiddie Kostume Kavalkade from the landmark Milwaukee Road Depot on West Grand to the landmark East Side Market Square. (Both landmarks have entered the after-life.)

The big event Friday night was the queen judging and coronation ball, featuring Griff Williams and his orchestra, at Lincoln Fieldhouse, where Audrey Tork, “a personable young brunette,” topped five finalists to become the 1954 National Cranboree Queen. In the brilliant lights used for the newly-prominent television cameras, the 1953 queen, Leanne “Sis” Parmeter, brought Audrey to stage center as the Williams band played, “O You Beautiful Doll.” Queen Audrey

received gifts that included a three-piece luggage set from Heilman’s, a red coat from Johnson Hill’s, a seven-diamond cocktail ring from Johnson Jeweler, two-dozen roses from Dahl’s and two tickets to the Gene Autry Show from Wisconsin Rapids Elks Lodge No. 693.

Audrey, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Tork, 446 Cook Ave., was enrolled in the liberal arts course at Marquette University. The prospective dental hygienist “admitted she thought her chosen field would combine well with homemaking.”

On Saturday of Cranboree weekend: free fire engine rides at the East Side Market Square, sponsored by Rapids Lumber and Supply Co.; an Old Timers Reunion at the Elks Club (All Old Timers Welcome); and the National Cranboree Pie Baking Contest at Lincoln Fieldhouse. The winner was Mrs. Lester Balthis, Oakdale, who was looking forward to presenting a “Frosted Cranberry Pie” to President Eisenhower. She would also make a television appearance on WBAY-TV.

The evening’s Bananoree Parade went from “the depot” to the East Side Market Square, then the Witter Field. It featured the Banana band, Wisconsin Rapids American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps and the local Boy Scouts Drum and Bugle Corps. At Witter, the Tournament of Champions Invitational Drum and Bugle Corps Contest: won by the renowned Madison Scouts, “which put on the most brilliant display of music and marching ever seen at Witter Field.” But most entertaining was a display of

“jive drumming” by the Gopher Elks Drum and Bugle Corps of St. Paul,” a “Negro” unit.

Dancers enjoyed a hoe-down by the Doleys Bros. Orchestra at the Memorial Armory.

Sunday, 30,000 servings of Cranboree sherbet were served to viewers of the Cranboree Roundup Parade that proceeded from depot to square to Grand to 8th to Witter Field for a massed finale of 2,000 musicians.

The Championship Rodeo at Witter Field ended the weekend event.

Forget me not: Dixie Ann Sarchet Kuenn, 69, Orlando, Fla., the 1951 National Cranboree queen, who died March 12, 2004. She graduated from P.J. Jacobs High School, Stevens Point, in 1952 and attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Sarchet won the Miss Wisconsin contest, was named Miss Wisconsin in 1954 and went on to the Miss America contest. She married Harvey Kuenn in 1955, a Major League baseball player who managed the Milwaukee Brewers in the early 1980s. They later divorced and he died Feb. 28, 1988.

10-11-04

Elsi Schultzenheim

Wally Ives and I were co-conspirators. In the radical Eighties, against conventional wisdom, we wanted to save the Wakely Inn, scheduled for demolition by its owner, Great Northern-Nekoosa Corp., of Port Edwards.

At about the age I am now, the genteel Ives was president of the South Wood County Historical Corp. and I, at the age Jack Benny always claimed to be, was municipal historian with the *Daily Tribune*.

At his television repair shop in Wisconsin Rapids, Ives and I cooked up our schemes. He asked a pilot friend at Great Northern-Nekoosa Corp., with authority over the Wakely structure, what could be done. He was told that the company might change its plans, "if you find somebody who could take care of it."

One of the first to step forward was David Teske, a member of the Central Wisconsin Home Builders Assoc. Teske, with Ives and myself, signed the original incorporation papers of Wakely Inn Preservation, now Historic Point Basse, Inc. Coincidentally, Ives had been in the house previously, to fix a television problem. It didn't work because the antenna was buried in six inches of bat guano.

Ives, who grew up in Marshfield, came to Wisconsin Rapids in 1956 to work for Harold Collman's radio and TV service. "Then I had a chance to set up a shop for Speltz music." Soon, Ives went into the TV repair business for himself.

But he is best known for his night job: band leader and trumpet player.

It began at home. Ives' dad, a Dixieland-loving businessman and Marshfield mayor, rigged a PA system on his car for advertising purposes, "and he would ballyhoo with that. Bartman's shoe store here was going out of business and we went along, my cousins and myself. They'd give us these belts and we would go along the street and march to Dixieland."

After playing trumpet in Marshfield school bands, Ives started his professional career with Irv Lutz & the Florida Five. Of the Stevens Point band, none of the members had been to Florida. "And I was with the Delta Boys in Marshfield and also Benny Graham, a darn good band in Point."

Next, Ives went to the Blue Denim Boys of Winona, Minn., playing the polkas and waltzes that became his trademark. "Then they formed a new band, the Country Gentlemen, and I was in charge of the trumpet section. We played several states."

When he started his own band, Wally hired his brother, Lovell, on trumpet and as arranger. In order to take advantage of a poster already available, Wally changed "Six Fat Dutchmen" to Wally Ives & the Jolly Dutchmen, meaning "Deutsch-men" or Germans.

The group became familiar to those who tripped the terpsichorean fantastic at Skyway, Eagles club, Bulls Eye and Golden Gate.

For out-of-town engagements, Ives and the band crowded into a station

wagon that towed a trailer. They played all surroundings states and such notable venues as the Eagles Ballroom in Milwaukee and Indian Crossing Casino near Waupaca.

Back in the day, Ives recorded with Lawrence Duchow of Appleton for RCA. At age 27, Ives signed his own contract with Mercury records. A recently-produced CD features some of his good-time standards: "Milwaukee Waltz," "Aunt Ella's Polka," "Oody's Polka," (his brother was called Oody), "Timberscript Line," "Elsi Schultzenheim," "Braves Polka" and "Schtinker-waltz."

In the 1970s, Ives played with a Rapids/Point Dixieland band, "Uncalled Four Plus Two," that included Don Chesebro on clarinet, Carmen Lane on piano and Bob Worth on drums.

Ives left Rapids for Florida and Upper Michigan when he retired at age 62. Now of 1412 S. Adams Ave., Marshfield, he returns [2004] regularly for the Wisconsin Rapids city band with which he counts 32 ongoing years of playing and directing.

As the future music Hall of Famer told me, "It's been really a wonderful time."

A more complete interview with Wally Ives was published in the February 2005 Artifacts.

10-23-04

Leadership

Apathy, they called it, with a little too much enthusiasm. Fifty years ago, less than half the eligible voters were expected at the polls.

Nevertheless, from the nasty non-Presidential campaign of 1954, emerged two major Wisconsin figures.

•*For the Republicans, Melvin Robert Laird, 32, Marshfield, Wis.*

After the 1946 death in office of Melvin R. Laird Sr., a Presbyterian minister, Melvin R. Laird, Jr., by then a decorated WWII Navy veteran, took his father's place as a Wisconsin state senator.

By 1954, Laird Jr. had six years in the state senate and one term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Laird told a Republican rally at the Rapids Elks Club that Democrats had resorted to smears, half truths and falsehoods to divert Wisconsin voters from former President Truman's soft record on communism, crime, corruption and war, all reversed, said Laird, by President Eisenhower and the Republican congress.

His GOP had ended the Korean war, empowered the FBI, passed the St. Lawrence Seaway bill, increased social security benefits, lowered federal excise taxes and chopped 27 billion dollars from the federal budget.

Responding to charges by his Democratic opponent, Kenneth Anderson, Stevens Point, Laird defended his voting record for veterans' legislation.

In a sweeping victory that would typify his career, Laird lost only Anderson's home county.

•*For the Democrats, William Proxmire, 38, candidate for governor.*

The Illinois native had graduated from Yale University and Harvard Business School. During World War II, he served in Military Intelligence and then in the Wisconsin State assembly for two years. Briefly a Madison newspaper reporter, he was the son of a surgeon and considered, like his opponent, "wealthy."

In 1952, Proxmire ran unsuccessfully for governor. For the next two years he campaigned almost continuously. Unemployment, he said, was hurting city folk and a drop in dairy income was bad for country folk. And Wisconsin state finances were badly handled.

His program for better schools, welfare institutions and roads meant more jobs and steady prosperity, said Proxmire. Wisconsin had been a leader in humane legislation under the La Follette Progressive Republicans but now big business Republicans were in control.

Proxmire admired the aggressive campaigning of "Fighting Bob" La Follette and emulated it, perhaps talking with more persons personally than any other campaigner in state history and with hundreds of thousands more via the new medium of television.

On Saturday, Oct. 2, Proxmire spoke at a dinner in his honor at the SS. Peter & Paul church dining room in Wisconsin Rapids. He proposed a \$200 million

school building program that would take half the tax burden off the property taxpayer, financed by higher taxes on the rich.

Proxmire's opponent was the incumbent, Gov. Walter J. Kohler Jr., 50, also a Yale graduate. The manufacturer of plumbing fixtures, whose company was undergoing a big strike, was running for his third term.

Kohler pointed to honesty and efficiency in state government; a cut in income taxes; and millions spent wisely on buildings for state institutions and school.

According to Kohler, Democrats were unwilling to admit anything was possible in America except by an "emergency" that brought about government intervention, controls, pump-priming and war.

When Kohler won by a whisker, with 51 percent of the chads, a recount was demanded by labor supporters, but Proxmire preferred to interpret the election positively. It had been the strongest Democratic showing in 29 years, he said, and spoke well of the future.

Speaking of the future, 1954-style...

Earlier that year, a long-time Democrat, James Doyle Sr., lost the nomination for governor to Proxmire. Now, fifty years later, the governor of Wisconsin is James Doyle Jr. In 1966, the same Jim Doyle Jr. married Jessica Laird, the niece of another candidate from back in '54, our own Melvin R. Laird.

11-01-04

Farrish

A good-sized crowd showed up at the 1010 Baker St. home of Donald and Marion Farrish but, no problem; even in February, there was enough strawberry shortcake for all. This was a promising start for a planned oral history interview series, spearheaded by Wisconsin Rapids Sunrise Rotary member Jim Mason and attended by several of his cohorts.

A whole lot of people know the Farrishes. I met them when their son, John, suggested we do “something to remember,” lifted Lincoln’s head from his body and got us suspended from high school.

The Farrish forebears were merchants and lumbermen here in the 1800s.

Marion grew up in the Wood County town of Richfield, the daughter of Alma and Arvid Backstrom, a brick-layer.

Marion said that, in 1937, she was the first Wood County “dairy queen.” Her position led to a job with county agent H.L. Lathrope and a move to Rapids. She lived with her mother and a group of young women her age in the same house at which our 2004 interview was conducted.

Marion met Don in the vicinity of the juke box at the Witter hotel. Their first date was for an Elks Club dance.

At this point in our conversation, I was surprised by another coincidence as Marion turned to fellow interviewer Jim Mason: “Don proposed to me on the davenport at your mother and dad’s house.”

“At the Mason house?”

Jim Mason, like Don and Marion, seems to have connections to just about everybody. Indeed, the proposal took place at Lloyd and Dorothy Mason’s, 530 Mead Street, where Marion stayed when she worked at Gross Brothers trucking company.

Don had been hired by Leo Barrette at Consolidated in the sulfite mill lab. He soon moved to the sales office in Stevens Point, and back to the Rapids main office. After their 1939 marriage, the Farrishes moved to Chicago, where sales manager Walter Mead educated them in city life and enjoyed Marion’s cooking during visits to their apartment.

At the beginning of World War II, Don directed an athletic program in Boston for the military but, “wound up as a beach master leading in the Marines and sailors.”

During the war, Marion worked at Marshfield’s Roddis plywood company, which was then making parts for Liberty ships and British planes.

After the war, Don worked in Chicago, where his boss, Mead, left every Thursday on the 1 p.m. train for Oconomowoc. At 4 p.m., Don took the Hiawatha for Rapids.

Mead’s father was Consolidated president, George W. Mead, who had been Don’s Sunday school teacher at the Rapids Congregational church. “My attendance was very good when he was there,” said Don. “He did the level best to keep on the religious stuff, but he wound up telling us about his trips and so forth. Those were things that drew

me there. When he was gone, I didn’t always show up.”

Don was also Mead’s caddy in the early days of Bull’s Eye Country Club.

During the Depression, Bulls Eye couldn’t afford to run the “second nine” and they closed it down, Don said. So he and Mead’s son-in-law, Henry Baldwin, started the Tri-City golf course.

After World War II, Don traveled back and forth to Consolidated’s Chicago office, residing at the then-new YMCA. Marion stayed busy here with her children and her mother.

When Consolidated launched Consoweld, a plastic laminate company, Don helped set up nationwide distribution. “And I covered the whole United States on their expenses. It took the curiosity out of my soul. I saw the whole country.”

When Consoweld experimented with constructing houses out of their product, Mead sent Farrish out west to ask Weyerhaeuser and others if they should continue building the plastic houses. Farrish came back and told Mead “he ought to get out of that business and he did.”

“Consolidated did a lot for the community,” said Don. “The Mead family were very generous and old G.W. lent all the kids money to go to school. During Christmas, he would open up his house on the Island and invite us for parties.”

(For the complete interview see the November 2004 “Artifacts,” a publication of the South Wood County Historical Corp., 540 Third St. S.)

11-08-04

Wagner's World

Each of us is a secret world. Blunders, stupidity, suffering and struggle mark every human life far deeper than transient joy and happiness.

With such words, Rev. Philip J. Wagner, the Catholic priest who built the Rudolph Grotto Shrine, began his autobiography, "Milestones and Memories."

Then pastor of "St. Philomena's" in Rudolph, Wagner wrote, "As the light beams over my table in my study I am still writing of my happy young-manhood. Since then, more than half a century has gone down the corridors of eternity, and I have grown considerably older and more sullen."

Born in 1882, Wagner wandered the farmlands of Iowa as a youthful and unrepentant nimrod. With a sling-shot, he "toppled off" birds from posts and branches, "striking down as David did Goliath."

Along the Turkey River, the young "David" saw chipmunks and squirrels playing hide-and-seek or a cottontail frightened from its hide-out. "How I would have enjoyed banging at it with a rifle or shot gun! In those days my brothers and I destroyed everything that did not earn its own living. We trapped

the gophers, caught the sparrows, killed the killdeer, poisoned the rats, beheaded the groundhogs, and deodorized the skunks. Crows were often caught in traps or killed with strychnine."

"We cannot have a man in the house who is afraid of blood," said his sister, demanding Wagner butcher a chicken for Sunday dinner.

While stroking the shiny feathers, he mused, "Now to think that from this fowl's bright eyes the world of light should fade forever!" Holding "her" legs in one hand, he cut the neck half way through but the bird gave a jerk and ran off, with Wagner in pursuit. He seized the head and with one twist, it came off. "Before me the feathered biped was leaping demented. Could it have acted differently when its mind was lying in the grass, while its body was still performing?"

Later, while stationed at Rudolph, Wagner liked to fill idle hours by taking his firearms and beagle into the brush, stalking "bunny fluffy-tail." In one notable incident, he thought he saw one, and suddenly there rang out his "Bang!"

Only to be answered by an angry voice from the direction he had aimed. "Look out where you're shootin'! I'll kill ya!" Two men, "highly incensed," approached, one carrying an ax, the

other a brush-hook. "You'll get yours now. Why don't you look where you're shootin'?"

Facing Wagner was a father and son, who had been cutting brush. The son, holding his abdomen, said he surely would die; but seeing him walking along, Wagner noted, "I thought it cannot be too bad."

The abashed cleric advised his victims to see a doctor in Arpin at his expense. He also proffered a \$10 bill. "I am sure it was the most they had ever earned in such a short time."

In 1926, Wagner returned to Iowa and went fishing in the familiar Turkey River. The fish weren't biting so he and his friends grabbed pitchforks "and into the river I plunged, striking the water with my fork."

"Splash! Splash! Splash! Out came one fish after another.

"Kill 'em! Kill 'em!" shouted Wagner's uncle.

"Here, take and eat!" Wagner yelled as he threw a wet fish squarely across his uncle's mouth.

Good for a laugh and one last "Got'm."

11-22-04

WSAU

Now came early this year, along with a flipping horizontal hold, slanted lines and a persistent buzz. Because of nefarious NFL negotiations, the Sunday-night Packer game wasn't broadcast from Wausau; but it was on Channel 5, WFRV, Green Bay. Unfortunately, non-cable reception was no better than it had been fifty years ago.

Until October 1954, we had been peering through a virtual blizzard usually emitted by Channel 2, WBAY, Green Bay. Then, a new Wausau station, WSAU, went on the air.

One of the founders was William F. Huffman, owner of the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune* and Radio Station WFHR. Also involved were the Antigo *Journal*, Marshfield *News*, Merrill *Daily Herald*, Rhinelander *News*, Wausau *Daily Record-Herald* and Radio Station WATK Antigo.

Said the *Tribune*: "There has always been a close and kindred feeling between the cities of the upper Wisconsin River Valley, all springing from the lumbering days and living on in the papermill age. They have met—at least until now—on the playing fields.

"The men and women of the valley cities have always shown a warm interest in the happenings of the others, exchanging visits to special community affairs and meeting together to work out common problems."

The new WSAU-Channel 7, would be a CBS affiliate but would air stories from the NBC, ABC and DuMont networks. It would be the first station close enough to be viewed clearly here by means of a roof-top antenna. "Television enthusiasts in the Wisconsin Rapids area, their appetites for the new entertainment medium whetted by fringe reception from Milwaukee, Green Bay and the Twin Cities," said the *Tribune*, "have been waiting eagerly for the opening of the Wausau station."

Wisconsin Rapids native and 1937 citizen of the year, George Frechette, was named station manager, vice president and general manager. He had been general manager of Radio Station WFHR and business manager of the *Daily Tribune*, which he had joined in 1928 as a reporter.

Other staff included assistant general manager Richard D. Dudley, from WSAU radio; chief engineer, Roland Richardt, a WSAU radio pioneer; station program manager, James K. Harelson; art director, Sid Kyler.

Weatherman Howard Gernetzke, from WSAU radio, stood behind glass and drew in the movement of air masses on a map of the U.S. Walter J. Chilsen from WLIN, Merrill, was newscaster.

"Big events as they happen can be brought into the living rooms of Central Wisconsin," said the *Tribune*. "The medium can also give punch and impact to national news stories, punctuating the oral report with pictures, slides and

action shots."

Network shows included "Jack Benny," "Toast of the Town with Ed Sullivan," "People Are Funny," "Liberace," "Hit Parade" and "Four Star Playhouse." Familiar "sustaining" shows were "I Led Three Lives," "Cisco Kid," "Hopalong Cassidy" and "Joe Palooka."

"As guests in your homes we must guard the quality and good taste of all programs," Frechette said. "As the only television station in the Wisconsin River Valley we must be prepared to serve all interests in the entire area—business and economic, as well as social, religious and educational."

How were we going to accommodate television sets in living quarters that weren't designed for the soon-to-be-dubbed "boob-tube"?

Louis Nichols solved the problem by cutting a hole in the wall between the living room and one of two bedrooms and placing a swivel table in the opening. Now, the TV could be seen from the living room, kitchen and the two bedrooms.

"Experience here and elsewhere indicated that the family's original tendency to abandon all other forms of leisure activity in favor of television-watching," offered the *Tribune*, "will be corrected in time as the novelty wears off and the family winnows out the programs it doesn't care for."

11-29-04

Bee Bee

It could have been called “Stupidville”; but the amusing incidents took place right here in River City. They were noted in the column, “What’s Buzzin’” by “Bee Bee,” probably William “Bill” Beckmann, managing editor of the *Daily Tribune*.

Samples from 1954:

•It was a hot afternoon when Marjorie Bidwell placed a cake in “the oven” and dozed off, only to be awakened by what she thought was the cake burning. But the oven was empty and she couldn’t find the cake ... until she looked in the refrigerator.

•While at Johnson Hill’s, Mrs. Lawrence Kundinger’s ten-year-old son, Larry, won a puppy, so Mrs. K. picked up the dog and a case of dog food. When she reached home, she realized she had left behind a minor item, her three-year-old daughter.

•Mike Hanneman, 4, escaped from his father and mother in a downtown store, only to be spotted, looking up at a startled lady, and declaring, in his unusually deep voice, “Hiya Babe!”

•Kindergartner Jerry Schneider was telling about dancing classes and explained, “When the girls jump up we could see their girdles.”

•Sharon Allworden, 9, Port Edwards, home from the Port pool, was asked if she had been swimming. “No, I walked around the pool two times trying to find a place to jump in without hitting some-

body, and there wasn’t any so I came home.”

•At Immanuel Lutheran vacation Bible school, Dorothy Thedens, 5, snipped off the sleeve of her sweater between glances from her teacher.

•At the Methodist church, one offering envelope was sealed tight; glued; Scotch-taped; and stapled. “That’s my boy!” Mrs. Leslie Trowbridge affirmed. The envelope was opened and a dime fell out. “Yes,” said Mrs. Trowbridge, “That’s my boy, Tommy.”

•In the 21st Avenue area, Mayor Justeson, Engineer Cajanus and five aldermen were examining a map and paying no attention to an over-friendly pup. “Watch out, Art!” But, before Art Wittenberg, vice mayor, could shout “scat,” he had a wet shoe and trouser cuff. There followed loud chuckles and witticisms about the dog ordinance being enforced and the need for better sewage and drainage in the area.

•As Royal Baker opened the door to the family soft drink supply, he was greeted with a line drive from the stopper on a root beer bottle. Stuff had quite a kick, from the dent it made in Royal’s complexion.

•Police Chief R.J. Exner had trouble hearing since a New Orleans convention he had attended. A probe by a Rapids physician found a piece of cotton inserted during a plane ride. “The jovial police chief took a look at the ear plug, shook his head, smiled, paid the bill and walked out.”

•As Norm Nordley [sic] was moving a ladder, a paint bucket plunged earthward. “Norm is not one to waste anything and so he made a valiant backhand stab at the flying pail. He caught it but his effort to save the paint was a total failure, unless you count the fact the gray stuff completely covered Norm.”

•At Perry’s Sport Shop, Rapids police Officer Herb Zuege brushed against a musky plug that became imbedded in his sleeve and he had to borrow a knife to cut it loose.

•As his father shot down mallards left and right, Leon Schmidt Jr. was the retriever, in water two inches over his boot tops. “Wonder how many perch were lodged in the bottom of their boots.”

•Barney Goggins, en route to his office from duck blinds, found himself in a local eatery wearing two different kinds of shoes. “He had another pair at home just like it.”

•Fireman Clarence Cheatle shot a duck, then kayoed it with his gun stock before putting it in his hunting coat. A wiggle, a flap of wings and out flew the duck, suffering from lead poisoning, shock and a loss of prestige. For his troubles, Clarence was given the next shot.

It was followed by a steady pow pow and four more pows as the duck flew on through the heavy fire, circled at a rather high altitude and headed south.

12-06-04

Gronski

So the Spirit of McMillan Memorial Library Past takes Kathy Gronski for a ride.

First stop, 1950.

At one-room Pleasant View school, they see a young country girl lost in “Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm,” a book borrowed from the collection in the corner. “It gave me that feeling of being transported some place else,” Kathy tells the Library Spirit.

From the rural Sigel location, they fly to St. Philip’s Catholic School, Rudolph. Here, the country girl finds all classrooms used and books shelved in a hall. Her first true library waits at Rudolph high school, from which the girl, Kathlene Smith, graduates in 1958.

Two years later, at 8 a.m. on a Monday, she’s in Shakespeare class at Wisconsin State University, Stevens Point. But it’s “Mrs.” now; the previous weekend, Kathy married fellow student John Gronski. Their son, John, is born in 1961, followed by Robert, Kenneth, James and, last, Edward, in 1967.

Next the Spirit brings Kathy to the studio of radio station WFHR. It’s the early 1970s. Here, broadcasting a Rapids city council report, is the part-time reporter, her boys seated at her feet.

“I learned how to tell a story in a minute-thirty,” she recalls.

In a moonlit morning of 1973, the year the government didn’t change daylight-savings-time back, the working mother

hurries to get the boys to school, and herself to an 8 a.m. job as a bookkeeper at a dental office. “What the dickens?” exclaims the Library Spirit at another stop. He has led Kathy into a jungle.

Really, a classroom at Grant School, transformed with the help of giant wooden spools from the telephone company, stacked up like a tree hut. It’s the first elementary-school library in the district.

“You’re now a librarian,” principal Schwendinger told Kathy, then a teacher’s aide, in 1976. “I want a central library.”

“The teachers didn’t care so much about the books leaving,” Kathy told the Spirit, “they didn’t want to lose the book shelves.”

At last, they arrive at the big house, McMillan Memorial Library, 1978. The new Associate Children’s Librarian reads aloud from favorites neatly stacked in row upon row, like “Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.”

“I loved being in the children’s room,” Kathy tells the Spirit. “I enjoyed coming to work every day.”

In 1987, she moves to the business office to be titled variously, Administrative Assistant, Head of Support Services and Business Office Manager under directors Ramon Hernandez, Bill Wilson and Ron McCabe.

Identifiable by the jingle of keys, she’s busy, responding to the library Director, the board of directors, co-workers and the public—listening, consulting, solving, supervising, helping. She also edits

“At McMillan,” the newsletter. “I could go to work in the morning and have my list of things I was going to do that day,” she explains, “and never get to one of them because that much new walked in or presented itself on the phone or came from the director’s office or whatever.”

Her last assignment, she says, was to reorganize the support staff with a building-wide perspective, “a major, philosophical change.”

Finally, the Library Spirit ushers Kathy into the board room, busy with board members from her early days: Gennaro, Conway, Endrizzi, Gilbert, Fischer, O’Brien, Barrett, Lenk, Sabetta, Schmidt, Orcutt, Nobles, Retzlaff, Fezziwig, Tenpas, Hagen.

“Special people, selfless.” The list works its way toward the present.

Hanson, Brennan, Ellie, Rasmussen, Bukowski, Miller, Daly, Wasson.

The Friends of the Library: Sisley, Berklund, Clark, to name a few.

And the lively persons from portraits on the wall? Scott, McMillan, Burt, Witter, Mead, Bell, McCourt, Brazeau, Hayward.

Gronski?

“I love this library,” she says. “I loved it from the day I walked in.”

Kathy, [then] 64, retired at the end of the year, 2004.

12-13-04

Grace

Unless an able Samaritan lifts her into a wheelchair, my aunt Grace will pass the season in bed. Just now, she happens to be looking at me, so I need something to say.

"Have your eyes always been blue?"

No reply from behind the outdated eyeglasses someone was good enough to place on her. From the background, comes the jingle of a familiar carol: "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night, the angel of the Lord came down..."

"I wonder what color your dad's eyes were?"

Through age and thinning of hair, Grandpa's skull has surfaced in her as it does in due time with all his descendants.

"Do you like the flowers? Florence said it's your birthday. You're 82, right?"

Inside somewhere, I think she answers but her tongue can't get the sounds out. An institutional caregiver most likely already heard her last word.

The carolers carry on, hoping to soothe those in need. "Fear not, said the angel (for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind)."

"Parkinson's" had made Grace a fearful lamb of God, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a white-sheeted manger. Her neck is bent stiffly to the side, bringing her head inches from the Oprah show she isn't looking at because she's helplessly staring at me.

"Do you like it here?"

At "Good Shepherd," nursing home, she finds herself among the brood she had grown up with. One December evening, they trotted off, young, to the Christmas party at Pleasant View school and, what seemed like the next night, lay down beside the still waters, old.

Christmas last, we set the wheelchair where Grace could face the carolers from the Methodist church, sharing "glad tidings of great joy." Her head was already bowed but she knew me and made sounds only I could catch the meaning of. She told me she liked the mashed potatoes but not the squash.

Her ordinary silence had been a lifetime habit. Perhaps by default, more than intent, she had lived like an Evangelical United Brethren nun. Never smoked, never drank, never...

A long list of things she never did. But let me lay out a few fragments of what she did do.

Christmas before last, she was excited by the Packers and Badgers and looked forward to whatever post-season heroics they might provide.

Christmas before that, looking at old photographs, she provided names of a generation she had known well but hardly anyone else alive had ever met.

Christmas before that, she showed me another album. It had been compiled by a hearty, middle-aged bird watcher and tour taker. Who would have predicted Grace would be adventurous in retirement?

Christmas before that, she had been transported from "assisted living" to a nursing home in the same complex.

And before that, she lived in the house on Main Street that I had hoped to take my children to see. It was a museum of all the similar wallpapered and lamp-shaded homesteads I, as a child, had visited in that town. To the end, it smelled as it did in 1955, like warm milk fresh from the cow.

Christmases before that, who knows what she did? The rest of us were busy in other places thinking about other people.

Christmases before that, she was north of town at the farmhouse, where we blessed the ham and played Old Maid while snow from open fields blew against dark windows.

Christmas before that, she was a little girl and I was yet to be born.

Christmas before that, they say, appeared one or more angels to shepherds and sheep alike, calling out glory to God on high and to the Earth, "Peace."

12-19-04

Holiday Spam

Each of us has looked out from the comfort of our homes on a blustery winter day to view our postman going about his delivery of the daily mail. We likely have looked with admiration and pity at that public servant, who day in and day out, rain or shine, serves us in the old tradition that the mail must go through.

But within the past year, the pleasant anticipation of a letter from Grandma, word from friends, our favorite magazines and all the other mail we look forward to, has been dampened by another form of mail, which has made the always-difficult job of the postal carrier that much tougher.

Wry words of woeful wisdom from the *Daily Tribune* during the holiday season of 1954.

The problem had started 15 months earlier, when the U.S. post office department allowed direct mail advertising. Soon termed "junk mail," it allowed a flood of advertising circulars addressed not to an individual but to "Householder," "Letter Carrier Route," "Letter Carrier Patron," "Residential Patron" or just plain "Occupant." Advertisers brought big bundles of mail and paid, not by envelope but by weight. The carriers then had to drop one item to every address on their route.

"The carrier thus takes the place of the school boy who used to deliver such forms of advertising by tossing them in the general direction of your front door for a fee paid for by the advertiser," said the *Tribune*.

One advertiser said, if he got six replies for each 1,000 pieces sent out, he felt the expense was justified.

Acting Postmaster John Billings told the *Tribune* that Rapids carriers handled four separate "junk mail" deliveries in one morning in addition to normal mail. One of the items was the size of a Sunday newspaper.

Carl Newman, a local carrier, said, "It has made a bill peddler out of us. Sometimes we start with a stock of stuff that is piled higher than our heads."

Patron response was the same as that of the letter carriers, according to the *Tribune*. "They don't like it." Mrs. V.C. Trewyn of 9th Street said, "It is pure waste. I don't read any of it, and most of it I don't even open. There is not room in our box for anything else on days when we get a flood of advertising. Some of it is dropped in the yard and it blows in the streets."

The *Tribune* was happy to enter the fight against junk mail, "Loading up our mail boxes and adding to the load on every taxpayer's pocketbook." Residents were encouraged to write to their Congressman in support of legislation

sponsored by the national letter carriers association.

However, a letter to the editor from Cleve Akey suggested the *Tribune* was a biased commentator.

It was not proper, he said, to excuse the inequities of 2nd class privileges, such as those enjoyed by newspapers, by exaggerating and condemning the practice of handling 3rd class matter. Junk mail was already going out every day, bearing a 2nd class permit, he said, in "hundreds of publications dealing with such important matters as sex, passion, unfaithful wives, murder, crime, detection."

Akey said he didn't know why the editor should expect the public to supply aid to magazines like *Life*, *Look*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers* and *Esquire*. "Nor do we understand why a four page piece of advertising delivered by the mail carriers differs from a four page insert mailed free by the *Tribune* and delivered by the same carriers."

Apparently, the old adage held true. Perhaps it was Poor Richard (the inventor of free mail delivery) who first penned in his venerable Almanac the timeless adage, "One man's Spam is another man's ham."

12-27-04

Girly Man

It is with great humility that I boast about this award.”

I know what you’re thinking; but don’t snicker at the Diedrich Knickerbocker Lifetime Achievement Plaque. Long ago, the sly scholar himself was quoted in the first volume of the book series, *River City Memoirs*. “What important beings are we historians. We are the powers that be. We historians decide the renown or infamy of our fellow mortals. We historians are benefactors of kings, guardians of truth, scourgers of guilt, instructors of the world, etc.”

We are what we say we are, true enough. But so what?

The Knickerbocker: what is a little history worth in the baby-brained mercantile Babylon in which we live?

The Knickerbocker: what does it bring the fawning recipient besides a coated-enamel plaque to hang next to the mirror? How about the keys to River City? How about a six-figure stipend from the River City Foundation? How about a lifetime complimentary buffet at River City Japanese & Chinese Restaurant?

How about a lifetime subscription to the *River City Daily Tribune*? How about knowing you’ll never have to pay for another drink in River City? Take a deep breath, gentle reader. For good and evil, it’s been 25 years.

A quarter century ago, this now venerable scribe, by which I mean

myself, ascended the *Daily Tribune* stairway for the first time. That makes me the longest-term writer and possibly the most ancient “employee” of the *Tribune*, barring some route driver supplementing his or her social security in hopes of being able to afford a new muffler before the tie rods give out.

Admittedly, my record makes Brett Favre look like a girly man. For 25 years, all deadlines, no matter how excruciating, were met. That would amount to more than 500 stories started and just as many finished. My tenure as River City City Historian is almost as long as that of journalist.

My mother and my sister, both deceased these many years, traveled to River City City Hall for the municipality’s birthday party hosted annually by then-mayor James Kubisiak, who signed the official citation for an honorary position without pay. That last unfortunate phrase suggested an astounding fact of historical journalism, namely the contrast of dirt-cellar wages and penthouse power.

It was a big dose of River City irony when I found myself spending a number of my \$5-per hours interviewing Stanton W. Mead, former commander-in-chief of Consolidated Papers, Inc. Mead had been listed in *Time* magazine as head of one of the nation’s wealthiest industrial stockholding families. He was long retired, yet by sitting quietly across the table from me, the genial octogenarian was raking in an estimated thousand times per minute what I was.

Yet, his future reputation depended on words like this.

After Mead’s story was published in the *Daily Tribune*, he telephoned me to provide a quote I’ve repeated often: “Dave, I went to River City Kentucky Fried Chicken and everybody knew me!”

For my part, in conclusion, I would like to thank all you River City reprobrates for making the latest half of my life worthwhile by giving me the Knickerbocker prize. But I can’t thank you for the piles of ducats and this wonderful plaque, because none of it exists. Lies are not always any better than truth.

What I can do is honestly and wholeheartedly slobber all over the River City Knickerbocker Award committee CEO, board of directors, executive director, staff, clerical group, spiritual advisors, foundation, donors, consultants, etc.

Because I created the organization and its prize out of thin air as I earlier created River City itself.

After a quarter century, it kind of goes to your head: the power of the press.

+++

Forget me not: LaVerne E. Keller, 74, a Trib veteran of thirty years when I met him. A lot of *Memoirs* were delivered to Verne in the “backshop,” where he offered frank counsel to ad reps, reporters, photographers and editors alike.

01-03-05

Assumption

They had better dances at Assumption.

The Wisconsin Rapids Catholic high school on Chestnut Street often featured rock 'n' roll bands on Saturday nights, whereas my home institute, Rapids Lincoln, wouldn't allow such uncouth cacophony.

The Assumption I knew in the early 1960s was an almost-new and first class institution, its first year of operation being 1954-55. The long, modern-style, brick building was conveniently located just below "the hill" from Lincoln High School, Witter Vocational School and Wood County Teachers College.

"Old Lincoln" is now East Junior High and the other two buildings now commune with the real Grand Avenue Bridge in the architectural afterlife.

Carl Billmeyer of A.F. Billmeyer & Son architects of Rapids designed Assumption, built for about \$1 million. The fact that the new school would accommodate as many as 700 pupils showed a lot of faith in fecundity.

On the first floor, were 10 classrooms, offices, cafeteria, kitchen, storerooms and a small chapel. On the second floor, 18 classrooms. A third floor "penthouse" housed a convent with 20 private rooms, a dining room and another chapel.

Plans for a "Tri-City Catholic" high school had been formulated in the summer of 1951. It would be sponsored and financed by the parishes of SS Peter & Paul, St. Lawrence, Our Lady Queen of Heaven (St. Mary's), in Wisconsin

Rapids; St. Alexander, Port Edwards; Sacred Heart, Nekoosa; St. Philomena, Rudolph; and Holy Rosary, Sigel.

Bishop J.P. Treacy of the La Crosse diocese, who was involved in numerous building projects, secured two Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, Milwaukee, as teachers. When the school opened in September, 1951, on the second floor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven elementary school, there were 36 students.

The name Assumption was chosen because, in that year, Pope Pius XII proclaimed to the world that the "dogma of the assumption" of Mary, Mother of God, into heaven should be taken as an "article of faith." Mary, "having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory."

Other Assumption high schools were established in the region, including those at Davenport, Iowa (1958), East Saint Louis, Ill., Louisville, Ky., Burlington, Ontario, Syracuse, N.Y., Miami, Fla., and Napoleonville, La. There is also an Assumption high school at Assumption, Ill.

Enrollment in Rapids for 1952-53 numbered 93, including only the freshman and sophomore classes. A survey showed that within a few years the total high school enrollment should reach nearly 600. The total for 1953-54 was 176, reaching by then into the junior year.

As the new school opened in 1954 with Father James F. O'Connell as principal, construction work continued. Faculty consisted of local parish assis-

tants and nine Sisters of St. Francis. The Mother General was Rev. Mother Madeline; local Superior and Vice Principal was Sister Marie.

Other Catholic communities were following similar patterns. In Stevens Point, St. Joseph's Academy for Girls, established in 1922, became the new Maria high school about 1955, the same time Pacelli, a successor to St. Peter's for boys was built. Maria and Pacelli merged in 1970.

Marshfield Columbus was completed in 1952.

Wausau Newman started in September 1951 at St. Mary's school and later at St. James. Their then-new building opened in 1956 with a blessing by the ubiquitous bishop, Rev. Treacy.

La Crosse Aquinas, in the heart of the diocese, dated to 1928.

Mauston Madonna operated from 1933-65; Pittsville Maryheart, 1949-1961.

The Catholic high schools relieved the pressure of the baby boom on their public peers; but, in a few years, a similar wave of construction, this time taxpayer funded, engulfed former farm fields at the edge of Point, Marshfield, Wausau and right here, in River City.

01-10-05

Parishes

Assumption High School, Wisconsin Rapids, opened fifty years ago, supported by seven Catholic parishes.

SS Peter & Paul

The oldest was SS (various punctuations, for "Saints") Peter & Paul. The first official masses in then Grand Rapids were offered as early as 1837 by priests from Green Bay and Portage.

A small wood-frame mission was built on what is now Third Avenue North, about 1854. After a fire destroyed the West Side mission in 1857, Rev. James Stehle began building a real church on the East Side. It was completed by his brother, Rev. Nicholas Stehle and Rev A.T. David.

In 1873, a new church was built on Second Street North. The present structure dates to 1951.

SS hosted a succession of schools: 1886, in the old parish residence; 1895, a new four-room building; 1913, two rooms added; 1924, four more. It all went up in flames on Christmas Eve, 1924.

A new school: 1925.

St. Philomena

What became St. Philomena's (now St. Philip's) in Rudolph was a mission to SS Peter & Paul in 1878 under Rev. P. Pernin. Rev. August Van Sever became pastor of the new church in 1885 and opened a school with the Notre Dame Sisters of Milwaukee in charge.

After 33 years, Van Sever was succeeded by Rev. P.J. Wagner, the grotto builder, who was still in office in 1954.

Railroad service bypassed the church area and a new village grew up in the present location. A 1921 building housed a school, convent, rectory and church. The present church/rectory combination was completed and dedicated in 1951, the same year as SSPP.

Holy Rosary

The Sigel congregation dates to 1881, when it began to be served by Rev. Klemecki in the homes of John Jagodzinski and Peter Brostowicz.

Five acres were donated by Joseph Jagodzinski for the 1882 church and cemetery. Operation as a mission alternated between Junction City, Rudolph, Vesper and St. Lawrence in Rapids, with which it shared a Polish ethnicity.

Junction City-based priests were named Krogulski, Babinski and Lugowski. In the early 1900s, a school was built with Frank Andrejewski as teacher. His son, Joseph, became the first priest ordained from Holy Rosary.

Sacred Heart of Jesus

Nekoosa's church was a 1900 mission of Rudolph's Rev. Van Sever until Father Joseph Feldman came in 1901 to a new church building. A new church was begun in 1930, supervised by Father Theodore Fraling.

In 1908, a school was built, courtesy of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, Milwaukee. In 1938, the school was replaced with a six-room building on the same site.

St. Alexander's

The Port Edwards church was organized 1940/1941 by Rev. Thomas E. Mullen. Most members came from the Sacred Heart congregation at Nekoosa. The name was supposedly chosen in honor of Bishop Alexander J. McGavick of La Crosse. First masses were held in the recreation room of John Edwards High School. The church was finished in 1942.

Our Lady Queen of Heaven

In 1947, West Side Catholics formed Our Lady Queen of Heaven (St. Mary's). Until the school/church building was completed in 1949-1950, masses were held in the Palace and Wisconsin theatres.

Property was purchased from the Stanton Mead property. The adjacent Nels Johnson home was used as a rectory until the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi occupied the property in 1949.

St. Lawrence

When West Side Polish Catholics organized St. Lawrence in 1900, the first masses were in private homes.

Following the appointment of Rev. James Korczk, a combination church and school was built in 1904. It burned ten years later and a new building and church were completed in 1915.

Names of priests resemble those of Sigel's Holy Rosary: Korczyk, Ciszewski, Mieczkowski, Rombalski, Eichman, Marmurowicz, Klimek. Sometimes history can sound like a good polka.

01-24-05

House Calls

There was a new guy in town. Sure, he only wanted to help; but I avoided him like the plague.

According to the *Daily Tribune*, “Andrew” landed here from Michigan in 1953, when I was eight years of age. Friends and family called him “Andy,” although to us, he was “Doctor Hulme.”

He had joined doctors Handy and Garrison in their new clinic on 3rd Street South, across Dewey from “old” Riverview hospital. The attractive ranch-style clinic meant progress.

Our family physician had been Garrison himself, whose office was listed in a 1941 directory as being in the Mead-Witter building and probably was at that address when I knew him.

Didn’t that mean that the afflicted had to cough and wheeze their way up long steep stairs to second floor offices? Not if they were bedridden, or if there were too many to haul in, as happened when our family came down with measles. Then, house calls could be made.

About 1950, Dr. Garrison or Handy hazarded a visit to our rented house on Clyde Avenue and prescribed what I remember as Karo syrup, water and salt. It was awful but not the reason I ran from doctors.

No matter what a kid went in for, the big nurse said, “pants down,” grabbed a big hypo of penicillin and stuck a needle in the rear. “It wouldn’t hurt as

much if you relaxed.”

So, I learned my lesson.

No matter how deeply I had sliced my thumb with an Exacto knife; nor how high the bayonet that pierced my shoe had sailed; no matter how rusty the shovel that dented my forehead; how rabid the dog that gashed my leg; no matter how inflamed the bumps, burns, lumps, moles, pencil stabs and concussions; mum was the word.

Nothing against Dr. Hulme. He was perfect: solid, capable, trustable, friendly-enough, kindly-enough, firm-enough (I’m guessing now). With his glasses, white frock and, on house calls, black bag, he was a spitting image of a doctor.

When Dr. Hulme was still a new guy, his colleague across town, Doc Pomainville, was kind of old and I couldn’t avoid him. But I didn’t care; he was somebody else’s doctor, not mine. A charismatic healer who used boating stories as therapy, “Doc Lee” phoned me at the *Tribune*. In his office was lawyer A.J. Crowns at 90-plus.

“Dave, ya gotta meet this guy and I don’t think he’s gonna last much longer.” Pomainville didn’t last much longer either.

Now, the news comes that Dr. Hulme, the new guy, got old and died, January 13, of this year, at age 81. He had delivered three generations of babies, according to his colleague, Dr. Regis Chamberlin. One of them was probably my brother, now 49.

When Dr. Chamberlin became the new guy, I didn’t have to avoid him

because the appointments were for my daughters rather than me. By then, the cure-all was Amoxicillin not penicillin and it came by spoonful not by needle.

As Chamberlin related, Dr. Hulme was often called in for consultations by a succession of younger associates.

For much of a long afternoon in the 1980s, I waited for him with a sick daughter, way up in one of the new multi-story clinics that supplanted the Garrison-Handy facility.

It became apparent that Dr. Hulme wasn’t going to make it back soon from delivering one of the 7,000 babies he has been credited with, so my own little darling and I split the scene for the Shopko pharmacy.

When I needed a doctor for myself 20 years ago, I had to find a new guy in a new place. The first question from the boyish visage of Marvin Vos was, “How old do you think I am?”

“Couple years older than me, I hope!”

Now, just when I was getting used to him, he retired, and, the heck of it is, I have to start over with an even younger new guy I’ve never seen.

Wonder if that big nurse is still around. It’s enough to scare your pants off.

01-31-05

Comics

How to poison that unwanted relative—10 cents.
Ax murder technique—10 cents.

Care and feeding of vampires—10 cents.

A study of adultery—10 cents.

What if your little darling brought home this set of documents? A few younger parents would deep-six the trash immediately.

Most would remove it to a private area for further study; because you are the generation whose minds were destroyed by the evil that infiltrated River City fifty years ago.

It was the noxious plague of comic books.

In late 1954, a *Tribune* reporter sampled 16 issues sold here and found enough gore, lust, mayhem, murder, sadism, perversion and other stinkers to turn the stomach of the toughest adult.

For instance, *THE VAULT OF HORROR* by William M. Gaines' Entertaining Comics.

When Gaines, the publisher of "Mad" magazine, testified before a Senate subcommittee on comic books and juvenile delinquency, Sen. Kefauver showed Gaines a cover that depicted a man holding a bloody ax in one hand and the severed head of a girl in the other.

When Kefauver asked if Gaines considered the cover in good taste, the publisher replied wickedly, "Yes. It would have been in bad taste if the

head had been held higher to show the jagged neck dripping blood."

Of interest was the admittedly well-written tale about a deranged father who played the Halloween game of hiding bones and guts in a bag, telling his neighbors to reach in and grab ... parts of his own daughter!

The story was by Ray Bradbury, author of *FAHRENHEIT 451*, a 1953 novel in which a fireman, to protect society, burns books. On the fireman's jacket: "451," the temperature at which books are said to burn.

From the basement of his Sport Shop and Chinese slingshot dispensary at 240 E Grand Ave., Calvin J. Perry distributed 15,000 comic books each month to 16 retailers. Perry said reading matter should be policed by parents and not outside agencies. For his part, he would not permit his own children to read what he distributed.

There were some naughty bits, "but there's not a thing I can do about it." He said he was out of business if he didn't sell what the public wanted. Perry predicted the industry's voluntary code and the "folding up" of the Gaines enterprises would fix the problem.

Nine persons answered inquiries from the *Tribune*.

R.E. Clausen, superintendent of schools, urged parents to "teach children the fallacies behind the lurid stories portrayed in cheap printed material."

Wood County Sheriff Arthur E. Berg urged a legal ban; Police Chief R.J. Exner, voluntary censorship; Msgr. C.W.

Gille, of SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church, government censorship; Mrs. Laurel Gross for the United Church Women, state and national legislation; Judge Byron B. Conway, legislation, not by "blue noses" but carefully worded; Rev. Milton C. Feldt, appeals to stores and publishers.

Rapids Mayor Nels Justeson, national censorship: "There again I want to add that no law or ordinance is any stronger than society wants it to be."

Clarence Lukaszewski, Alderman, said the public spent a million dollars for school instruction for the same children who spent 10 cents to destroy what they had learned.

A letter-writer said non-Christian parents were as fond of reading the comics as the children were, so Christians should band together against Satanic forces.

In that spirit, Wisconsin Rapids police had a bonfire. Chief Exner invited children to round up bad comics and bring them to their schools. Saturday morning at Witter Athletic Field, four boxes of objectionable material were burned. Lest the amount seem insubstantial, said Exner, "The children have really responded well when one considers that the collection was in progress only three or four days."

He said burning the books was a step in the right direction.

Oh yeah, the venerable Alfred E. Neuman grinned; it would be a good blaze—if it reached the level of *FAHRENHEIT 451*.

02-07-05

Mary Hogan

Cupid came before Christmas but the heartbreak had not yet been fully written by Valentine's Day.

As far as anyone here knew, the object of attention had been a woman of late middle-age, waiting alone at a tavern southwest of Bancroft, Wis., on County Trunk D.

She was not at the scene when Portage County sheriff Harold Thompson arrived and what he saw caused him to issue a statewide alarm for Miss Mary Hogan, and her escort, instinctively assumed to be a male.

According to the Dec. 9, 1954, *Daily Tribune*, the discoveries had been made shortly after 5:15 p.m., the previous day. That's when Seymour Lester, who lived about a mile distant, had stopped to purchase ice cream.

Lester told Vilas Waterman, town of Pine Grove supervisor, that it looked like there had been a fight at the tavern. Or maybe something worse.

About 6 p.m., the Portage County sheriff's office was notified and Thompson arrived at the bar. More dark conclusions were foreshadowed by what he found:

Markings that showed someone had been dragged into the yard. An empty .32 caliber cartridge on the floor of the blood-soaked bar room. A spilled cup in the center of a table. A chair next to the table, overturned. A cash box, emptied, and a roll of nickels and two \$1 bills left on the barroom floor.

Had Miss Hogan had been drinking coffee when the intruder entered?

Thompson believed that whoever robbed the tavern and must also be responsible for the tavern keeper's disappearance was someone she knew.

Crime lab technicians said the amount of blood spilled on the barroom floor precluded the victim being alive. Their investigators found a .38 caliber revolver, assumed to be Miss Hogan's, in a back room, where she lived. It had not been fired.

Miss Hogan was characterized by Thompson as a large woman "well able to take care of herself." Originally from Chicago, she had run the tavern for something like six years and was considered suspicious of strangers. She was unmarried and had no known relatives in this area.

Neighbors had seen a 1951 green Dodge pickup truck parked next to the tavern during the afternoon, before it sped off to the west.

A search for that truck occupied local authorities during the initial investigation.

Wood County Sheriff Arthur E. Berg said he and officers Donald Caylor and Dave Sharkey and Deputy Earl Tess patrolled adjacent South Wood County roads until midnight with no results.

Later, Thompson came to Wood County to question suspects and search for a truck that had been seen on the Port Edwards dam the night of the incident.

Officer Dave Sharkey helped Thompson check out the lead and said no signs

that a body might have been thrown into the Wisconsin River from the dam were discovered.

The green truck was a red herring. It was soon established that a neighbor had been in the tavern after the truck had left the scene, apparently with Mary Hogan still on site.

Witnesses said the neighbor left at 4:40 p.m., so "Evidently it was after 4:40 p.m. that the killer arrived," the sheriff said.

The green pickup belonged to a Portage County man, whose daughter had been with him when he stopped at the tavern Wednesday afternoon for cigarettes and a beer.

The sheriff said his office was running down every clue but "so far everything has fizzled out."

The only other positive development was discovery of a bloody fingerprint on the coffee cup that had been overturned on the table in the tavern. No one knew who had left the print. It personalized a billet-doux of the worst kind, sent early but still not deciphered by this day in 1955.

02-14-05

Zieher's Arpin

Glen Zieher's favorite word is "Whatchamacallit." That's because he's losing his memory, he says. Maybe, but he has plenty of whatchamacallit in reserve.

Since 1992, Zieher has resided you-know-where, but his memories of his boyhood home in that other, smaller town out past Vesper by Skunk Hill, may be the fondest.

Born in 1933, he figures, the son of Otto and Katherine Proesel Zieher spent his early years in five different locations along one mile of highway north of Arpin. Meanwhile, the name of the highway changed three times.

After his first move, Zieher said, "Mommy, let's go home."

Mommy said, "You are home."

He won't forget Butch, a dog left with the Ziehers by a soldier sent to Japan in the last months of World War II. Out by the road, Butch was run over by a neighbor and killed.

"That was a terrible day for me," Zieher said. "I prayed all during mass that Butch would be alive when I came home. I was so sure that dog was going to be back. Somehow, I got a little bit mad at God for a couple days."

"Then my dad felt so bad for me that we went and got that little dog Teddy from a good friend of my dad's."

Glen's father, Otto, was town chairman and, thus, also a county board member. He would pick Glen up after school and say, "I gotta go over and see if they're putting that gravel on the

road."

"You know how the trucks dump the gravel, one big hump after another. He was always in a hurry. He'd drive right over. Ooomp! Ooomp! I hit more damn ceilings."

"It was amazing he could live to be 86 years old."

At Central State College (now UWSP), Zieher's advisor was Fred Schmeekle, namesake of the Schmeekle Reserve. Besides Michigan State, only Central State offered a college course in Conservation at the time. "I think the first year was 1952. I was among the very first group. I thought, 'This is for me,' because I liked the outdoors, hunting and fishing and so forth."

He won't forget being one of the early visitors to the Frederick and Fran Hamerstrom prairie chicken preservation project near Plainfield. "Groups of maybe twenty of us would go out with a professor and we'd stay overnight. All they had was five or six bunk beds. Everybody would bring a sleeping bag or something."

"In the morning Mrs. Fran made all the twenty young college kids breakfast on that stove. They had a hand pump by the sink; I don't think they had electricity."

"Fred took us out in the field and assigned us to our blinds. It was quite an experience."

Zieher's college career was interrupted by military service. He returned to Point but didn't finish because he got a job in 1958 as a rural mail carrier back home in Arpin, where he stayed

for 33 years.

He helped organize Arpin as a village in 1978 and was the last justice of the peace there in 1964. To that, can be added town board, 1966-70; volunteer fire department; village president; county jury commissioner; American Legion; Elks.

"You wonder why I lost my hair? I was so tense for forty years because I had so many irons in the fire. Nine groups and offices in seven: that took its toll."

He also organized the Wood County basketball league at Pittsville and took Arpin baseball teams to tournaments that included Milwaukee county stadium in 1961, 62 and 63.

In 1963, he started Evergreen Acres Nursery, a private enterprise.

In politics, he is Republican, a group to whom age-induced amnesia is endemic. "My dad was a big Laird supporter," Zieher said.

One of the highlights of Glen's travels was a 1966 honeymoon to that big humid city on the Potomac where Wisconsin Representative Melvin R. Laird Jr. gave Zieher and his wife, Jean, a full tour of the thingamajig the whoz-its meet in.

See the February issue of *Artifacts*, a publication of the South Wood County Historical Corp., 540 Third Street S., for photos and more memorable material from Glen Zieher.

02-21-05

Rudolph Neighbors

If a neighbor girl were seriously injured in an auto accident and the expenses were too much for her family, would you help? It was the first question I asked the readers of the *Daily Tribune* and the people of Rudolph answered with an emphatic, “Yes.”

“It shows what this community is all about,” said Jerry Wix, my neighbor then as now. Jerry and I got acquainted when my job was to help him lay up a stone front on my house. The baby daughters we had then are now old ladies in their late twenties.

On a Saturday morning in February 2005, Jerry phoned with a polite request he often makes. Could he do some rabbit hunting on my property? Of course, I answered with a good Rudolph, “You bet.”

According to a scrapbook I kept up for a while, the first *Tribune* story of my creation appeared Feb. 15, 1980, in the “Seventies,” a special section that celebrated “growth and change.” Then and during my first years on the beat, I roamed the central Wisconsin countryside and met hundreds of residents, only a few of whom I had known before, and saw a lot of things I wouldn’t have seen otherwise.

After a couple weeks of stories, *Tribune* editor Joe Karius asked, “Do you have a camera?” With misguided pride, I described my seven-year-old Ricoh 35-mm camera, purchased to photograph the early days of my oldest daughter.

So Karius appointed me one of a long series of “weekend photographers.” This was an educational albatross of a part-time job that I’ll describe in excruciating detail some other time. For the most part, the confident password, “Tribune,” was the ticket to sporting events, picnics, homes, reunions, festivals, schools, flea markets, executive offices, fisheries, archives, pancake breakfasts, nursing homes, dances, church basements and the minds of the populace.

Looking back at the Seventies section, I notice a photo I took of a young, dark-haired Michael Hittner at his natural foods shop. Can it be the same M.H. I saw on a recent weekend? This grizzled old-timer had a gray-white beard and was wearing clothes that looked like a fashion show from 1840.

Among the stories of the seventies I recapped in 1980 was that of the Rudolph public school, completed in 1975 only after it seemed that students might be transported to Rapids, commonly viewed as a den of propinquity.

The former grade and high school became “Hillcrest Plaza.” For a short time, it was a “mecca for country music” and a shopping mall at which I bought some indoor-outdoor carpeting still in use.

My second *Tribune* story took me to our neighboring community of Vesper.

The village looked pretty much the same as ever but there was change and growth here, too. When Andy’s Supermarket was completed, the story said, most of the town showed up to

carry boxes so Andy could move in that night. “That’s the way people are here,” Andy Simonis told me.

Back in Rudolph, I interviewed Naomi Jacobson about the planned nuclear plant and the rise of the League Against Nuclear Dangers. For the other side of the story, I talked to Ralph Cole of Wisconsin Power & Light Co.

If growth and change had said, “Yes,” to the nuclear complex, the twin towers would make up my northern skyline now.

As I was backing out of the garage on a Saturday night in February 2005, headed for the Wakely Winter Feast, the Jerry Wix I mentioned earlier, stopped by. He had bagged a couple rabbits and had one wrapped in a newspaper for me.

“Thanks, neighbor,” I said.

02-28-05

From Here

Better not let your readers find out.” Advice from Anton Dern and Max Andrae after I admitted that, though born in Wisconsin Rapids, I was conceived in Manitowoc.

Newcomers to River City, Dern (30+ years) and Andrae (50 years or so), knew that locals might figure I too was “not from here.”

“Mr. Dern,” of West Jr. High, is one of a large class of not-from-heres who arrived as novice teachers. Similarly, Andrae was among the talented youngsters who came to Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. and its subsidiaries.

Same with Daniel P. Meyer, who called about my February 28 story. He didn’t recall Ralph Cole working for the power company I mentioned.

What would Meyer know? He’s only been here 53 years. Actually, Dan is always right; it was “Roger” Cole.

Last season, my otherwise genteel wife, deranged by a Packer gaffe, swore, “Crumps!” It might be “Crumps” in her home Oconto county but in River City, it’s “Cripes” or “Cripes Almighty.”

My wife has lived here for two decades but it’s my daughter, born in 1989, who qualifies as “from here.” My parents were not-from-here, like many of their generation who came after WWII and became the city fathers and mothers.

Our Two Mile Avenue neighbors, for example: the Butzes, from Ohio; Caves, Hancock, Wis.; Endrizzi, Hurley, Wis.;

Murgatroyd, from here.

Rapids patriarch George Mead I, was not-from-here, same as L.M. Alexander and T.E. Nash, founders of the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co.

A survey of “locals” who meet in my synecdoche support group: Hugh (Pennsylvania); Bob (Illinois); Hank (Illinois); Jeff (Beaver Dam, Wis.); Bill (New York City); Bruce (Kansas City, Mo.); Pete (Lancaster, Wis.); Tom (New London, Wis.).

Tim is the only homeboy at the table.

What about those who are writing our history?

Isherwood? He’s a Plover “common-tater” whose roots are so old they’ve grown tubers. But he will never plumb the depths of River City.

No one has published more Wisconsin history than Michael Goc of Friendship, Wis., but he’s from Chicago.

Mark Scarborough, the historical columnist formerly of the *Daily Tribune*, is from Edgerton, Wis.

Local history specialist Don Litzer, of McMillan Memorial Library: Marathon County.

J. Marshall Buehler, Nepco chronicler and South Wood County Historical Corp. president, is from Port Edwards.

The eminent Portage County historian, Malcolm Rosholt, who died at age 97 on February 20, was very much “from” Rosholt, Wis.

In national politics, George Washington was from here but Alexander Hamilton wasn’t.

Quintessential Wisconsin senator

Bill Proxmire was from Illinois. Hillary Clinton, from Illinois, is a New York senator, as was Robert F. Kennedy, from Massachusetts.

President George W. Bush was born in Connecticut but now he’s from Texas and Washington D.C. His father was born in Massachusetts. John Kerry was born in Colorado. Now he’s a Massachusetts’ senator.

My nearest neighbors in the town of Rudolph are both from Nekoosa. My longest-term neighbor, who knows every blackberry bush for miles around, is from the Stratford area.

In Rapids, where I was born but never lived, I am “from here.”

In Rudolph, where any red-nosed Rustler considers himself a true son of the curd, I will always be a transient, having moved to this postal address a mere 32 years ago [2005].

Back in Oconto, my wife’s mother was Kay Stewart, a former English teacher and head of the local historical society. When Kay died, my wife’s stepfather was proud that so many showed up for her funeral. After all, the former Kathryn Kenney, of Marshfield, hadn’t much chance to get acquainted, having just moved to Oconto 43 years previous.

“She sure knew a lot of people,” her husband said, “for a girl from out of town.”

03-07-05

Sampson's Burns

It was something you don't see every day and don't want to. One of our few remaining landmark structures was being reduced to a spot of pea grease on the riverbank.

On Saturday night, I viewed the smoking brick shell of a local institution that had seemingly guarded the north side approach for just over a century. I admired it all my life and had found my first factory work inside its sturdy walls.

Too tall for what it was in my time, the building held a mysterious fascination.

But Saturday, in contrast to the dark sky, light from a giant beacon and streaming water from hoses on high searched for the few flames that still flickered in upper floor windows.

Having started via a reputed explosion, the fire burned throughout the day of March 5, 2005. The structure, very close to a century old, was going to be a total loss, according to the *Central Wisconsin Sunday* account.

In recent years, it had been used by Northern Steel Castings, a foundry with 100 employees. The 34-year-old company makes parts for equipment used in mining construction, railroads and oil fields. Half the process took place at the now-gutted 80 Oliver Street (off First Street North) plant and the other half at Ninth Avenue South.

With the workflow disrupted, owners Glenn and Jeff Gregg and President Tom Nowak were uncertain about their plans.

The inferno was one of a series at the unfortunate location.

The site, "across the road" from SS Peter & Paul Catholic church "up past where the old swimming pool used to be" was formerly home to the Wood County courthouse and the city's most prominent brewery. The Grand Rapids "hop shop" was one of several productions of the Lutz family, beginning when old Jake Lutz and brother Andrew had moved to Stevens Point in 1867 to work at a brewery.

In 1880, the much-younger Andrew purchased the Schmidt brewery in Grand Rapids, which he sold the same year to Jacob and David, all Lutzes. (The Lutz genealogy will be straightened out at another time.)

Next door to the brewery, in the old courthouse, David Lutz Jr., lived in and operated a cigar factory. That courthouse/factory burned in 1885, victim of an arsonist "fire fiend."

Six years later, the brewery itself was destroyed in a "midnight conflagration." Arson was again suspected, perhaps in order to remove the building from valuable water frontage needed for various saw, pulp and paper mills.

When one of the Jake Lutzes rebuilt under the name Twin City Brewery, he bricked the walls and added an iron roof. Nevertheless, in 1895, "a lurid light in the northern heavens betokened no good" and the inflammation had struck again, plunging the building into "a mass of ruins."

Around the time old Jake died in 1901, his nephew, now known as Big Jake, opened a tavern south of the brewery. It was destroyed by fire.

Ironically, Big Jake was for many years chief of the Rapids volunteer fire department. Big Jake also ran the Old Empire tavern that seemed to have survived.

His greatest accomplishment was the Grand Rapids Brewing Company, incorporated in 1904, "rising over the ruins of the past."

But the 18th Amendment, effective Jan. 29, 1920, put an end to the production of beer. The brewery went into receivership and then to its vice president, H.A. Sampson, who converted it to a canning company.

According to Henry's son, Ray Sampson, who took over in 1928 and ran the cannery with his brother, Jim, until 1969, Sampson's went out of business along with other small canners when automated pickers came into farm fields and "the big boys" got into the canning business.

Another constant irritant, Sampson told me, was the state Department of Natural Resources.

Anyway it's gone, so I guess I can tell my friend, Betsy, to nix our plans for a restaurant overlooking the scenic Grand Rapids from high in the old brewery. In the patois of Big Jake, that great notion is, like the building itself, kaput.

03-14-05

Champions

While you were sweating bullets and your face was renamed “Big Red,” the boys stayed cool and coordinated. You, the Rapids basketball fan, suffered a little and celebrated more as your Red Raiders moved through the conference, then the regionals and sectionals and on to the state tournament.

This class was something special. Their conduct on and off the court made them a crowd favorite, despite their high ranking.

Their teamwork was extraordinary. Working together had become a habit. As “Coach” explained, it was a family-style group that had come up together through grade-school basketball programs and shared the ideals that make a championship team. On offense, every player knew where his teammates were, whether the high-scoring big guy was open or covered and whether his partner should go for the outside shot. Every player contributed to a balanced defense.

By supporting the team, you, wearing the scarlet letters “W-R,” were part of the winning campaign, along with students, cheerleaders, parents, townsfolk, teachers and administrators. In the crunch of fans wanting tickets to big games, the Lincoln principal, a former athletic coach himself, stood at the gate, handing out tickets.

But cruel fact tells us that, if the sport is basketball, a lot of years go by between state championships. So many

trips to Madison through mad March snow storms that have become a chapter in the story, only to return without the big trophy.

When the championship is replayed in memory and print, the roster of player-heroes is recalled fondly.

Charles Gurtler, center.

Doug “Boola” Gill, guard.

Jimmy Ritchay, guard.

Jerry Raasch, forward.

Don Brewster, forward.

Bob Olson, Jack Crook, Jim Grossklaus, Wayne Oestreich and Rodney Anderson.

Coach, Phil Manders. The principal? Aaron Ritchay.

The words that began this story could be applied to the team of 2005, but they came 54 years ago from the typewriter of Ed Hanson, *Daily Tribune* sports writer and WFHR sports announcer. The only year Rapids had ever won the Madison tournament was 1951, when the top-ranked Red Raiders beat Menasha and Menomonie prior to a 64-55 victory against second-ranked Madison West.

A victory celebration followed, in which some 3,000 local fans met the team upon its return. “Leading the Red Raiders through the crowds that lined the sidewalk outside the Armory was Game Captain Don Brewster, carrying the mammoth trophy after their championship conquest of Madison West on Saturday night,” wrote Hanson.

What had been a “bunch of friends having a good time,” 1951 team member Bob Olson told me in 1983, became

something more. “It takes a while for the impact to hit you, but eventually it comes back to you that you were on this team...”

In the same spirit, *Tribune* publisher Helen Jungwirth wrote, on the day of the first 2005 game in Madison: “It was a basketball team made up of friends who provided a memory for an entire community...and none of us who were there will ever forget.” She referred to the 1966 team, for which she was a cheerleader.

Another bunch of friends, the boys of ’95, who made the most recent visit to Madison until this year, already expressed a sense of history last week to the *Daily Tribune*.

Former player Bret Van Dyken asked the boys of ’05, Beamish, Stratton, Vidal, Shepard, Falk, Gellerman, Ritchay, Goska, Bartelt, Kolstad and Becker, to remember “they are living examples for the next generation of Red Raider basketball players that are going to be wearing their uniforms in a few years.”

It was Don Brewster of the boys of ’51 who said to me in March 1983: “You just went out and played and won and it was fun. You didn’t realize what it meant or how long it would last. It never hit me for about three years. Now every time you get a contending club they start talking about it, what happened, plays we made.

“It was an event but only later did I realize the strength of the moment.”

03-21-05

Uncle Ralph

Did what happened mean his life's work was, in my words, "meaningless?"

His vocation had been familiar to me since the 1950s, when he, my uncle, Ralph Engel, visited our new house on Two Mile Avenue and showed slides of the small concrete and metal residence at which he lived, in a jungle village far away.

Ralph, "the philosopher" student of Seymour, Wis., high school, and Mary, a missionary college graduate from New Jersey, had met at a Texas church camp meeting. After marriage, they joined Wycliffe Bible Translators and found themselves working with a language that had never been written, much less translated. It belonged to the Zoque (SO-key) "Indian" people.

In 1954, Ralph and Mary moved to Francisco Leon, deep in the Mexican rainforest, a mountain village that could be reached only on foot. Across a swift river from the cluster of habitations was Chichonal, a small, dormant volcano.

Ralph and Mary lived a large portion of each year in the village and worked on the prospective translation, beginning with learning the Zoque language. Meanwhile, their oldest daughter, who was crippled by polio, was followed by three more children born and one adopted.

The purpose that drove their lives, Mary wrote, was to give "a witness of Christ dying for their sins" to the Zoque people, and to have it written in their

native language so all could absorb and appreciate it. To this end, a translated Zoque New Testament was published in 1978.

Luckily, the Engel family happened to be absent in March 1982. That's when the volcano Chichonal erupted, sending terrified villagers to the Catholic church for shelter from a rain of stones and sand that collapsed most of the houses. When the volcano quieted, survivors fled on foot with whatever they could carry out on their backs, including babies and invalids. On April 3, the volcano blew again, obliterating what was left of the village.

Ralph returned to the land of his labors, looking for familiar faces among the refugees. When he made what we might consider a trivial sale, 16 New Testaments and 14 gospels of Matthew, he said, "Praise the Lord."

But only a few accepted the Word as offered.

"I explain salvation by faith because of what Jesus has done for us, but it does not get through to them," Ralph said.

When my uncle visited Francisco Leon in 1983, his guide hung a bundle on a stick protruding from the sand. "That is where your house used to be."

What did Ralph say, when all was lost?

"PRAISE THE LORD, the Zoque dictionary is off the press!"

In 1987, my uncle got on a bus with two boxes of the new 429-page "Diccionario zoque de Francisco León. Serie de vocabularios y diccionarios

indígenas" and traveled over a thousand miles to take them to the potential readers. The modest number of dictionaries was soon dispensed, along with seven New Testaments.

In 1988, Ralph visited the home town of a young Zoque who had helped with translation. "I walked around the village visiting homes with New Testaments and dictionaries to sell. There was some interest in the dictionary but no one bought any even though we offer them at a low subsidized price. It made me sad that no one showed any interest in the New Testament. I did not sell even one copy."

Over strawberry shortcake much later, I remember watching, with my parents, one last slide show: the remains of the village after the volcano, a landscape of ash. "What does it mean?" I asked. "How do you feel when all your hard work goes for nothing?"

He said simply that he had been blessed. He had been happy to be able to do his work which was that of the Lord.

Ralph Engel's labors came to an end in 1995, through his death at Waxhaw, N.C., where his widow, Mary, and several family members continue to live.

04-04-05

Old North Side

Streets to nowhere. Sidewalks to nothing. Steps to vacant lots. Historical markers with photographs of company offices, libraries, schools, shops and homes. This is where the town that moved used to be: North Hibbing, Minn., revisited last week by this correspondent.

Just around the bend from the empty grid, a wicked north wind whipped across the biggest hole dug by man, still being excavated for taconite ore. This was the Hull Rust Mahoning mine that literally devoured a prosperous city.

A short drive past the nearby Greyhound origin bus museum was “South Hibbing.” The former iron ore capital of the world is a testimonial to the 20th Century, when mining companies subsidized construction of a new town that included the landmark Androy Hotel; a high school with one of the finest theatres in the Midwest; and an up-to-date shopping district, anchored by Feldman’s fine department store.

Downtown’s main drag, Howard Street, can be quiet as a sleepy mouse now, as the area declines economically and in population, while the franchises of the “Grand Mall” attempt to move the town to the belt line and “New South Hibbing.” Consequently, some of the storefronts are vacant, many have changed names and the most likely nightspot to be noticed is Jimmy’s bar, dedicated to the nativity of a local bad boy made good, Bob Dylan.

Streets to nowhere. Sidewalks to nothing. Steps to vacant lots. Historical markers? None.

This is another place where the town that moved used to be: North Rapids. Just around the vacant block is the biggest, most powerful thing for miles around: the paper mill, heart of the former shiny-paper capital of the world. Most of the neighboring houses have been removed to make way for the mill and its accoutrements.

It’s windy on top of the world where those smokestacks culminate. And you don’t have to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.

A short drive south is Wisconsin Rapids’ downtown, a testimonial to the 20th Century, when paper companies subsidized modernization of a new town that included the landmark Hotel Mead; a high school with one of the finest field houses in the Midwest; and an up-to-date shopping district, anchored by Johnson Hill’s fine department store.

Downtown’s main drag, Grand Avenue, can be quiet as a sleepy mouse now, as the area declines economically and in population, while the franchises of the “Grand Mall” maneuver commerce further down the strip.

Consequently, some of the storefronts are vacant, many have changed names and the most likely social spot to be noticed is Joe and Alice Wallner’s From the Ground Up [2005] coffee house in the Mead-Witter building.

The other day, Joe and I were discussing a digital enlargement of historic Grand Avenue, when he asked if

there was still a West Side versus East Side rivalry. “Well, Joe let me tell ya. Times have changed. It’s not East Side West Side any more. Now it’s North Side versus South Side. And, this time around, who do you think is winning?”

We live in a town that has moved and continues to move.

Way back, it went from up by where the swimming pool and Sampson’s used to be, south to the Grand Avenue complex we knew as kids; then out to the 8th Street “Miracle Mile” my children called “downtown”; and now farther out 8th Street to “New South Rapids,” including and abutting Wal-Mart.

Most American towns move their shopping districts around to suit the times, e.g., Arpin, Rudolph, Nekoosa, Stevens Point, Wausau, Appleton, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Chicago. Nowadays, the destination is usually a four-lane highway corridor at what used to be the edge of town.

As Point college chancellor Lee Sherman Dreyfus predicted in the 1970s, it’s getting to be one central Wisconsin conglomeration. For Stevens Rapids and Wisconsin Point, the downtown-in-progress is currently named, “Plover, Wis.” as our mobile entrepreneurs keep a keen nose out for the stuff that’s blowing in the wind: the sweet smell of scented candles and hair spray.

04-11-05

Pupilation Explosion

Boom! Grove (1949).
 Boom! Children's Choice (1950), Howe (1951), Mead (1956).

Boom! Grant (1958), Pitsch (1959), Woodside (1959), Washington (1961).

An explosion of elementary schools, with their approximate go-boom dates, plus Rudolph and Vesper, built later.

Baby boomers born in heaps and bunches: your Lindas, Marys, Patricias, Johns, James and Roberts. The previous elementary or "grade" schools were too small, old and outdated.

When my own alma mater, Two Mile School, was demolished fifteen years ago, I took home a brick for a souvenir. Now, it's lost among the bricks from all the other buildings gone down since.

The disheveled landmark stood at Two Mile Avenue and 8th Street. That once-calm country corner had found itself smack dab in the heart of Miracle Mile.

My school closed at the same time as Irving school, about 1977, though Irving continued to host special education classes until 1979. "There is a certain relief in change, even though it be from bad to worse!" Washington Irving himself said.

Irving school was built in 1898 because Howe school was too crowded. Likewise, Grove was built because Two Mile was too crowded, Woodside because Grove, which I also attended, was too crowded.

When Woodside and Grove and Howe became jam-packed all over again, they added on more rooms. The men and

women who won World War II weren't about to see their schools get anything but better each and every year.

Remember Edison school on West Grand Avenue, in the vicinity of what is now the West Side fire station? At the end, Edison still had old-fashioned high ceilings, wide hallways and open cloak-rooms. There was a small room on the first floor that had been used for special teachers, "the nurse" and the West Side public library.

A Feb. 24, 1956, *Daily Tribune*, provided by Gale Jackson, described the walk, classroom by classroom, from four-room Edison to the new G.W. Mead school. "It claims a fair share of loyal alumni," said the *Tribune*, though the pupils didn't look back. Edison's time had passed and no one had any other ideas for the building except to sell it.

Thomas A. Edison himself once said, "There is no expedient to which a man will not go to avoid the labor of thinking."

Emerson, on 4th Ave North, was the oldest city school (c. 1885) after old Howe was demolished in 1950-51. In excellent repair, Emerson had been remodeled several times. In the early years, there had been a separate building on the grounds for kindergarten purposes. When Emerson was buried by Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., pupils didn't look back as they transferred to Lowell and Mead schools. Emerson's time had passed.

As R.W. himself said, "Tomorrow is a new day; you shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense."

Lowell school later closed and its pupils made their way to Mead school, without a trail of tears. Lowell's time had passed. As James Russell Lowell said, "Each day the world is born anew for him who takes it rightly."

Then there's Lone Birch. If they hadn't closed that homespun one-roomer back in 1967, my daughter could walk three minutes to school rather than getting up around midnight for the bus to Rapids. But she doesn't miss the quaint institute with its little belfry and toilets out back.

All pupils here quickly learn, as Jack Monson said, "Whichever way that north wind blows, it's cold."

It seems Grove is the oldest elementary building standing in the district. Grove was pretty much new when I sported skull & crossbones for Ray Lecy, the basketball coach, who once said, "Some day, David will be taller than any of us."

What happened?

The demographic bulge has deflated and the bulgers, for whom all those now-depopulated schools were built, are struggling with decisions. After you've spent several hundred grand on a suburban estate and your retirement investments disappoint, how can you afford educational frills that other people's kids - Madison, Emma, Abigail, Aden, Ethan and Dylan - don't really need?

Boom!

As A.M. Pitsch, then a teacher at Howe, was famous for saying, when an algebraic mistake came to light, "Who pulled that boner?"

04-18-05

Pardoning Mortimer

When Leonard Romanski started Rapids Market on West Grand Avenue in 1930, he was given some advice by Todd Payne, Chief of Police. Don't carry the day's receipts home at night, Payne said. You're better off hiding them in a money bag on the premises in a different place every night.

Prompting the words of wisdom was a murder that had taken place 18 years previous, Romanski's daughter, Marge Hamm, told me.

As previously published in the *Daily Tribune* and in "River City Memoirs," books, Edward Beardsley had waited in the house for his father to put the horse in the Beardsley barn on Sixth Street. It was October 1, 1912. Because the two had stopped downtown at the Daly drug store to buy a football, later, when he heard a noise from the direction of the barn, Ed wondered if his father had blown the ball up and it had popped.

Instead, Beardsley stumbled into the house and mumbled to his wife, Ed's mother, "Maggie, I'm shot."

Earlier that day, the elder Beardsley had been moving his grocery store into the old Barnes Candy Kitchen location near the Witter hotel. Because the building had a safe, Beardsley abandoned his usual custom of taking the day's late receipts home.

To investigating police officers, the wounded grocer described a short, thick-set assailant wearing a white handkerchief on the lower part of face and a soft hat pulled down over his eyes.

Beardsley died about twelve hours later.

Suspicion for the murder fell immediately on Mortimer Wilson, then 19, who had recently been employed by Beardsley. Wilson had been "out west" but returned to marry his girlfriend and needed cash. At a local home where he was playing cards with a party of young people, he was taken into custody by District attorney Charles E. Briere and undersheriff Julian T. Welch.

Found in possession of a knotted handkerchief of the type the suspect had worn and a .32 caliber revolver with one shell fired, Wilson was also confronted with a postcard and keys found in the Beardsley privy, where he had apparently thrown them.

By the next morning, he had made a full confession. Wilson said he followed Beardsley home from the store, intending to hold him up and obtain the proceeds of the day's sales, which he knew Beardsley carried. As the grocer unhitched his horse in the barn, Wilson pulled his revolver and ordered Beardsley to throw up his hands.

"You're joshing, aren't you?"

Beardsley reached into the buggy for a parcel, perhaps the football he had bought for his son, whereupon Wilson fired and fled. He told authorities he thought Beardsley was reaching for a revolver.

Wilson was taken to Wausau to avoid threatened violence and pleaded guilty at Stevens Point, where he was sentenced to life imprisonment at Waupun state prison.

He was a model prisoner, according to the Waupun warden who gave a testimonial of good conduct in Wilson's 1923 application for a pardon.

Also of influence in the decision were injuries to Wilson, indications of tuberculosis, and expressions by many Wisconsin Rapids residents that he had paid sufficiently for a crime committed in his youth.

The petition was prepared and presented to Wisconsin governor John J. Blaine by Wood County Judge W.J. Conway.

Undoubtedly of major influence was Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. president and Wisconsin Rapids mayor George W. Mead, who actively worked for the pardon. Mead was named Wilson's custodian on the condition that Wilson "obtain suitable employment and become and continue to be industrious and conduct himself in a manner compatible with good citizenship."

Wilson received the news of his impending release over long-distance telephone from Mead.

It was expected that Wilson would be freed immediately and would visit his aged mother, who then resided in Eau Claire, Wis.

For her part, even the widow of the victim agreed to sign a release for Wilson, causing a lawyer to remark, "Mrs. Beardsley, you are a saint."

She replied, "I have three sons and two daughters. God knows what their temptations might be."

The conditional pardon was made absolute in 1938.

04-25-05

Little Eau Pleine

I am pretty sure it will be now or never," George W. Mead "the first" told the *Daily Tribune*. In September 1954, a little more than fifty years ago, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. president Mead wrote an open letter published in this newspaper.

The state Public Service Commission and Conservation Commission were considering his proposed reservoir on the Little Eau Pleine River and Mead wanted to make his case to the public.

Mead's letter suggested a two-hour drive up "Road O" north from near Junction City "through the heart of the vast low area of the Little Eau Pleine Valley." At the "old bridge" crossing, the water would stand 20-feet deep under a new bridge, he said, after the reservoir was developed.

Pausing at the hill where county highway O met county C, Mead described a scenic view of the Big Eau Pleine reservoir, the prototype for the Little Eau Pleine version being considered.

"This is our largest reservoir, built about fifteen years ago by Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. and sold to Wisconsin Valley Improvement Co."

According to Mead, it had paid for itself several times by producing electric power. Not only that, before the Big Eau Pleine dam, both the Big and Little Eau Pleine rivers poured a vast amount of flood water into the Wisconsin. In Wisconsin Rapids, "Water stood in the Congregational Church basement two to three feet deep, Elk's basement also.

One night we had to get boats out and save several families living along 2nd St. S. who were marooned and severely frightened in the black night with deep water all around their homes."

"Besides the general flooding of streets and the general fear here, our paper mills suffered the flooding of their basements which were filled with motors and machinery so the mills had to close at a heavy loss to the companies and an interruption of the important payrolls on those days or even weeks."

The same thing happened to the Nepco mills. "Do you remember the low road between Port Edwards and Nekoosa was flooded three feet deep and do you realize it doesn't happen any more?" The solution was the Big Eau Pleine reservoir.

Now, Mead directed his attention to the Little Eau Pleine. According to plans, at a cost of \$6 million, it would flood 27,500 acres of land of which 20,000 were "low and worthless" farm land.

The farmers tried to improve their prospects 20 years previous, said Mead, by forming a drainage district, and digging miles of ditches, then planting crops, but the corps failed because the land was heavy muck, sour and cold. When the drainage district went bankrupt, Consolidated bought the defaulted bonds from Milwaukee banks and became owner of the 20,000 acres.

Like that on the Big, a reservoir on the Little would abate floods and furnish a large amount of low-cost elec-

tric power at no cost to the taxpayers. "Wherever there is ample, cheap power the population increases just as it has all along the Wisconsin River," wrote Mead.

Otherwise, the paper mills could expand their businesses by going to the South for cheap natural gas and fast-growing timber for pulp. Many had done that "and it is now a great boon to our Southern states," Mead said.

The mills in Wisconsin would continue to operate, he assured the readers, but they could not expand without additional cheap electric power. "We have no oil wells, no coal mines in Wisconsin. Railroad transportation is expensive and sometimes uncertain so of course we ought to use our natural resources to the utmost."

"A reservoir would be vastly more attractive to sports men than this impenetrable thicket of small trees and brush. This summer I have driven across Moon Road Bridge twenty times. There are always fishermen there, smiling and catching fish which cannot be said of most of our natural lakes in northern Wisconsin."

It would take two or three years to build the dam, lift the roads and place bridges "so we ought to get started at once."

"The lakes and surrounding areas can be developed into the best wildlife propagation in the entire state and will prove a great attraction and valuable benefit to Marathon, Wood and Portage Counties," Mead wrote.

05-02-05

Jake Chadwick

Call him “Jake” and list Charles James Chadwick, Jr. among the outstanding local baseball players to play at Witter Field.

He was born in 1908 at Torino, Ill., a coal mining town “that isn’t there any more,” Jake told me, along with co-interviewers Jim Mason and Pat Schuetz, at his 121 11th St. S. home, one year ago this week.

In Torino, his coal miner dad was in a tavern, while outside, a horse and a wagon waited for someone. “I was showing the kids what a brave boy I was; I would go underneath the horse from one side to the other. My dad come out when I was doing that. He took the buggy whip. I started running and he was switching me from the back.”

If that’s how he learned to run fast, Jake learned baseball “all around” South Wilmington, Ill., where the family moved. “Some of us had gloves and some of us didn’t.” “Born and raised” in South Wilmington, said Jake, was Pete Sakalosky, another future athlete of Wisconsin Rapids.

While at South Wilmington, Jake played for the nearby Joliet, Ill., baseball team. That’s when he met first baseman Joe Judnick, of Joliet, who would also find his way to our River City. “He was kind of jealous of me because I was playing for the Joliet team and I was still going to high school. First time I got up there, I hit a home run over the fence.”

After his 1926 graduation from high school, Jake signed on with the Mississippi Valley League’s Moline Plowboys. “The manager was the catcher too so when he wasn’t catching I was catching and when he was catching I was playing outfield.”

Meanwhile, Joliet’s Judnick went to Rock Island to compete in the same league.

Back in Joliet for winters, Jake played professional basketball at the forward position.

In 1929-31, Jake’s baseball career took him to the Joplin, Mo., Miners in the professional Western Association League. He was, he said, the kind of player who would sing and entertain on the bus rides.

He belonged to the Oklahoma City team “about half an hour when somebody called and told me to get ready to go to Wichita, Kansas, that I was traded.” Dizzy Dean’s brother, Paul Dean, said Jake, was pitching for Wichita at that time.

In 1934, another important call came, from George Gibson of Wisconsin Rapids.

“They offered me a job and a salary too. I figured I wasn’t going to the big leagues so I better get a job where I could make a living.” His employer was Gibson’s beverage company. Jake does not remember the name of the team. There was no real league and they didn’t play every day.

One of the other baseball players at the Roenius boarding house was Carl “Red” Bouton, formerly of Peoria,

Ill. Bouton, like his brother Farnum (Buzz), married a local girl, stayed in Rapids and ran a tavern. “Red played for a Detroit farm team,” said Jake. “I think I played against him when I was in high school, too.”

Jake met his wife-to-be, Dorothy Rember, while double-dating with his old buddy, Judnick, also now in Rapids, and Judnick’s fiancée, Margaret Hierl.

Some of the other players who had come here to stay were Bill Marlotte, Jimmy Summers and John Sandrin, none “from” Rapids.

Jake’s team played against Madison, Appleton, Oshkosh and the bearded barnstormers, House of David of Benton Harbor, Mich. He also remembers a ladies ball club.

“I’d see that they didn’t get to the plate,” he said. “They’d slide into home and I’d take ’em down.”

After the Gibson beverage gig, Jake worked the line at Preway several years before taking what would become a 36-year position at Consolidated, mainly as a supercalender operator. The shift work wasn’t so bad. You could play a lot of baseball before punching in at 11 p.m.

05-09-05

Zimmerman

Part One of Two

On May 2, *Daily Tribune* reporter Beth Burger told the story of Norman Casey, 86, a prisoner of the Germans from January 1944 to April 1945, when he was liberated by the troops of American general George Patton.

On Nov. 18, 1944, Lawrence Zimmerman was also taken prisoner. His story came to me in 2002 by way of his sister, Anne Bell, who asked me to edit Zimmerman's reminiscences so her family would know his sacrifices. "I realize his story could be every soldier's story who fought in the war," she said.

As Patton's army advanced across Europe, Zimmerman and his unit were commanded to take and hold a small hill. The objective was doomed when American tanks abandoned Zimmerman's group to bigger German Tiger tanks. About a dozen survivors surrendered.

Zimmerman could speak fluent German, so he tried to persuade the soldier guarding him to help Zimmerman's wounded buddy but was hustled away without knowing the outcome.

On the march to prison camp, Zimmerman saw a man shot because he didn't stand up fast enough and two more because they left the roadway. Another time, two brown-shirted men turned the horses they were riding into the column to see how many prisoners they could knock down.

In the camps, the POWs stayed 400 men to an unlighted, leaky, tent. They slept on straw infected with lice. Two spigots at low pressure provided water for a thousand men. The water was turned off at night.

Sometimes they didn't get anything to eat. Sometimes, they got a little bread, cabbage soup or tea. The worst was boiled dehydrated rutabaga. The best came from the Red Cross.

On Dec. 24, 1944, the POWs were marched to a railroad yard and loaded into the well-known 40X8 boxcars. The next four days, 68 men stayed locked in a car made for 40 with only an infrequent pail of water to sustain them.

When the prisoners yelled to protest and pounded on the door, the guards shot through the sides of the car, just above Zimmerman's head.

For Christmas, the Americans sang one stanza of "Silent Night." That's as far as they could get before they wept.

Back in camp, Zimmerman and some friends took the rare offer of a shower. When they returned, their clothes had been exchanged for ragged German army uniforms. They learned their original garb would be used by German infiltrators to pose as American soldiers.

The heavyweight boxer, Max Schmeling, visited and signed autographs. "We gave him a hard time about being defeated by Joe Louis, which he took good-naturedly."

At Zimmerman's last camp, the POWs watched the near-constant

bombing of Berlin at the same time German V-2 rockets were launched toward England. After a while, the camp could hear the Russians coming closer every day. Finally, the Red Army arrived in the form of one tank knocking down fences and everything imaginable.

The tank stopped, the turret opened and out stepped a woman. In broken English, she said, "Now you are free."

She got back in and drove off, knocking down more fences.

A Russian officer, who had been "freed" as a prisoner of the Germans, still wore part of his Russian uniform. Speaking fluent English he mourned, "For you it's good to be free but I could be sent to Siberia. I was not supposed to surrender. I was supposed to die fighting."

Zimmerman did not feel the joy of freedom until he was in a truck rolling down the Autobahn on one of Hitler's new highways.

Last stop was Camp Lucky Strike where Zimmerman met Ronald Wiperman, his wife's brother, a pilot in the Air Corps and also recently a prisoner of war.

Zimmerman said he had felt more secure in the hands of Germans than with the Russian allies. He even later learned the Germans had gone back for his buddy, as he had asked, and put in a steel rod that saved his broken leg.

05-16-05

'Buseum'*Second of Two*

A perfect story for the Memorial Day weekend, told by a bus.

On Sunday, May 29, the "Buseum" will arrive at the South Wood County Historical Corp. museum in Wisconsin Rapids for a short visit.

"Beyond Barbed Wire," an exhibit by the Iowa-based educational organization TRACES, is housed in the Buseum, a converted school bus. It explores the experiences of prisoners of war, or "POWs," from the American Midwest who were imprisoned in Nazi Germany.

According to the Buseum, there were three main waves of Midwest POWs: those captured in North Africa in 1943, pilots downed during the air war over Europe, and soldiers captured at the Battle of the Bulge, six months before the war ended.

Because of the high rate of German ancestry, numerous POWs from the "Heartland" spoke German, including our own Lawrence Zimmerman, subject of last week's Memoirs. Many had relatives behind enemy lines.

Common ethnicity was not saving grace for downed American airmen bombing Germany or Nazi-occupied countries. Usually, the civilians who apprehended them loathed the "Luftgangsters" ("air gangsters") and treated them roughly.

Nevertheless, most POWs later reported having given only name, rank

and serial number.

Such minimal information at times led German interrogators to scream and threaten abuse, or resulted in the POWs being forced to stand for long hours in the cold or rain to "soften them up." Some were beaten, while others were told they'd be shot if information was not shared.

After the first marches, 60 or more men were loaded into boxcars designed for transporting 40.

No food was provided on the train. Water was served irregularly in pails that, once emptied, doubled as toilets. Sometimes the transports were strafed by U.S. planes.

Each POW camp housed either officers or enlisted men, and was organized by service branch. Barracks were hastily built, under-heated, dark and, as the global war dragged on, over-crowded.

The Nazi captors generally honored the Geneva-Convention and did not force officers to work. Lower-ranked POWs were used for labor and might be housed in barns, mines, power plants, slaughterhouses or brick factories. The Buseum reports: "As they starved on an unsteady diet of rotten vegetables, German *Brot* stretched 20% with sawdust, or diluted grass soup, POWs turned to eating bugs, cats, birds or mice they trapped, edibles stolen or bartered from civilians, or horses lying alongside the road, killed by strafing. POWs even murdered for or over food."

To pass time, officer POWs turned to art in the form of drama, music, writing, Spam-can sculpture and sewing. They listened to the BBC and some produced "camp papers" with war news. Sports competitions between POWs attracted audiences of prisoners and keepers.

Many POWs had been wounded when captured. Most soon contracted dysentery. They lost weight, hair, teeth, patches of skin. Most had infected feet.

At night, murmuring, screaming and crying filled the narrow boxcars, barracks, barns or other places POWs tried to sleep.

During "death marches" at the end of the war, the POWs received even less food than they had before and too little water. They survived on stolen vegetables, dead horses or handouts from German *Hausfrauen*.

Usually, the first clue the war was ending was the abrupt disappearance of the German guards. As soon as possible, the POWs were trucked to collection points beyond the front or were flown to liberated France or Belgium.

"They departed changed men," the Buseum states. "They had seen the worst of human behavior; recovery would take years."

05-23-05

Litzer

Traditionally, Memorial Day provides an opportunity to reflect on those who have sacrificed in war time for our freedom.

“Not to diminish the bravery of those who gave their lives while in harm’s way,” said Don Litzer, Head of Adult Services at McMillan Memorial Library, “but there are too few opportunities to reflect on the accomplishments of ordinary citizens.”

He wasn’t talking about himself though he could have been. He has accomplished something here and he’s saying good-bye to River City. On June 13, he’ll be at his desk in the Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Ind., a major genealogical repository.

Litzer, 46, came to McMillan from the Cincinnati public library in 1996, to be closer to his family and that of his wife, Sarah, formerly of Milwaukee. He grew up on a dairy farm north of Halder, Wis., and graduated from Marathon City high school. He recalls the Quiz Bowl team of 1975, “the first year they ran on Channel 7. I was the captain of the team; we lost the playoffs to Assumption.”

As senior class president, he said, he gave the shortest-ever graduation speech and sang, “My Way.”

The 1980 Lawrence University alumnus worked as an insurance underwriter until 1990. The following year, he received a Master of Library Science degree from Kent State University in Kent, Ohio.

Litzer’s work as impresario of the

award-winning McMillan Coffeehouse series began in 1997 through the inspiration of local arts advocate Casey Martin and McMillan director Ron McCabe. Since then, there have been 118 events by 92 performers.

Memorable Monday nights included the Riverwood Roundtable and Mid-State Poetry Towers “battle of bards”; Donna Decker’s Key West extravaganza; a Lars and the Lizards rock concert shortened by a Packer game; a frail Fran Hamerstrom’s last-minute entrance; Tom Meier and his owl from the George W. Mead Wildlife Area; and the evening director McCabe filled in at the last minute for a missing lecturer.

Of Edith Nash, Litzer said, “She was in so many ways the grande dame of literature and culture here.” He will also miss Linda Aschbrenner of “Free Verse” magazine, he said, without mentioning his own first poem, published there.

Litzer’s contact with local history began with the Heart O’ Wisconsin Genealogical Society and progressed to his current stint as a columnist for *Artifacts*, the publication of the South Wood County Historical Corp.

When Litzer came to McMillan, he found “local history stuff too fragile, or too oddball to catalog, on a couple of tables in the lower level.” With the help of Sandy Young, Head of Processing, he organized the material and “carved out a space” for it.

“So when Paul Gross wants our catalog from American Carbonic Machinery Co., or when Doris King wants our 80th anniversary history of

St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kellner, we can find it. And more importantly, they’ll be able to find it after I’m gone.

“I enjoyed working with [then] South Wood County Historical Corp. director Pam Walker. She was open to the Library’s idea of making local history available online.”

He also drove a load of old newspapers to Madison with Mark Scarborough for microfilming at the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

At the library’s local history corner, Litzer credited volunteer Flores Gumz for her tireless work in keeping the shelves in order.

McMillan director McCabe, Litzer said, is memorable for realizing that libraries can’t be reactive in the face of change but have to be progressive.

And Litzer appreciated Assistant Director Andy Barnett. “According to his own description, he’s a ready, fire, aim guy, always doing something. Just look at his book and website.”

You do have a chance of seeing Litzer again. While Don resides in an apartment in Fort Wayne, his wife, Sarah, will be teaching in the Wisconsin Rapids school district.

“Sarah’s and my most lasting legacy to Wisconsin Rapids might be our restoration of the Victorian house on 440 First Avenue,” he said.

05-30-05

Dorothy Rember Chadwick

Remember Jake Chadwick? If not, you forget fast. The baseball player from Illinois was the subject of the May 9 *Memoirs*.

Remember Dorothy Rember? Now Dorothy Chadwick, she is very much “from here,” born Oct. 7, 1910, on the West Side of what was then Grand Rapids. Her father worked at Consolidated.

The Rember home was on 3rd Avenue North near the “Green Bay” railroad tracks. Dorothy remembers walking through piles of snow to Emerson school, past pleasant neighborhoods of North Rapids, now vacant lots and industrial installations adjacent to the Stora Enso paper mill.

Dorothy transferred to Lowell School and proceeded through 8th grade, with a few bumps along the way. “I was left handed and I had a teacher, who during writing class, she’d walk up and down the aisle. Every chance I had, I’d put the pencil in my left hand and she’d come along and she’d crack me on the left hand and tell me to use my right hand.

“One day, she took me to the first landing. The principal’s office was upstairs. She said, ‘If you don’t stop writing with your left hand, I’ll take you up to the principal’s office.’ I was scared to death.”

At the Congregational Church, Dorothy’s Sunday school teacher was Ruth Mead, wife of Consolidated president George W. Mead. After a party at the Mead house on The Island, Mrs. Mead gave Dorothy a ride home in the Meads’

celebrated electric car. “I remember sitting up just as straight,” Dorothy said.

Congregational pastor Rev. Robert W. Kingdon was a favorite of the Chadwicks. “He was low key and got along with local people. He would do anything for you he could. And he never wanted to know what people gave.”

Later, at Lincoln high school, Dorothy said, “Aaron Ritchay used to dismiss us about ten minutes to twelve so that we could walk home for lunch during the noon hour.” She also walked from the 3rd Avenue house to the East Side swimming pool, at the east end of the dam. When the clock chimed on the old library then near the courthouse, “We knew it was time to walk back home.”

After her 1927 graduation, Dorothy worked at the “overall factory,” near Emerson school, until it “quit business.”

One of the owners, Charlie Kruger, brought her to work at the office of the Wood County Wholesale Grocery, which he owned. Located about where the *Daily Tribune* building is now, it shipped Fairway brand groceries to the small “corner” grocery stores that predominated then.

Dorothy’s co-worker, Margaret Hierl, married Joe Judnick, an old pal of Jake Chadwick’s from Joliet, Ill. Judnick, who worked at the Rapids water-and-light plant, also played baseball, so it wasn’t surprising that Dorothy met Jake through Judnick and they double-dated.

In 1934, Dorothy and Jake “hopped on a train” to Crown Point, Indiana, just across the Illinois state line, where

they could get married without a wait. “We came back, found an apartment and this is it, for almost 70 years,” Dorothy said.

Married life began in the Depression but, the hard times “didn’t mean anything to Jake and I. We didn’t have too much but we had what everybody else had.” They didn’t buy anything unless they could pay cash for it and walked downtown and back with groceries from A&P. Their first car was a 1952 Ford.

Among her occupations was that of a full-time office secretary for the local Girl Scouts. Dorothy was also assistant leader of a Girl Scout group led by Mrs. Starks that included Dorothy’s daughter, Pat.

For this and other interviews in the series, I was accompanied by Jim Mason, who has surprising ties to just about everybody. Jim’s father, Lloyd, worked with Dorothy’s father and eventually took his place as Consolidated superintendent of shipping and finishing.

More personally, Jake and Dorothy Chadwick lived next to the Mason residence on Elm Street, where Jim’s mother, also named Dorothy, provided care and advice on child rearing. “When the baby was crying and you were afraid he was going to die,” Jake said to his wife, “you’d take it over or Dorothy would come over to our house and just pick him up and he’d stop crying.”

06-06-05

Murtfeldt

Any red-blooded man looks back at his days in the woods as the best days. All that's missing is a red-blooded woman. Former Consolidated Papers, Inc. V.P. Larry Murtfeldt managed to solve that problem.

Born in St. Louis, Mo., in 1909, Murtfeldt is a 1930 graduate from Washington University with an engineering degree. He came to Consolidated's Wisconsin Rapids headquarters in 1933. "I had read that they were building a big lake out of a river."

On the Petenwell project, Murtfeldt worked for chief engineer Bill Thiele. "They had already bought a lot of land, but there were farms that people still rented. My job was to see that things went right.

"Shortly after I got there, the Company wanted to do some surveying up above Wisconsin Rapids, which later became the Du Bay reservoir. I took a small party of men out and we did the job, trenched it and so on."

In order to educate him about timberland and logging, Consolidated sent Murtfeldt up to Minnesota, north of Grand Marais, not far from the Canadian border. The nearest company office was in Port Arthur, now part of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Consolidated president-to-be Stanton Mead and forester Emmett Hurst, drove Murtfeldt up to Grand Marais on his first trip. His job was to map land the Company owned so logging roads could be built. "We spent the whole

winter tramping around in snow about three feet deep."

Living in the woods was fun stuff for a couple of young guys. At noon, Murtfeldt and his guide, Jens Finstad, would make a sort of a raft on the top of the snow and build a fire. Jens would say, "We have a pipe now, okay?"

So they smoked their pipes. On a stick, they hung a tin can, filled it full of snow and maybe a few rabbit droppings and had some hot tea. What could be better?

During logging season, Murtfeldt worked as camp clerk, reporting to the Port Arthur office. He ordered food, including cows to be butchered, from Duluth. "All we had for refrigeration was the screened porch. That's where the meat hung."

Logging took place in winter with horses from "out west" and, from Duluth, 300 lumberjacks. The best were Finns and Swedes who accumulated enough money to head for a bar and/or brothel until they went bust and had to go back to work in the woods.

Lumberjacks hand-sawed eight-foot lengths of pulpwood which were hauled to the nearest river and piled on the ice. The spring flood carried the logs into Lake Superior, where they were rafted and towed by the tug Butterfield to Ashland, Wis., then loaded for rail transport to Appleton and Rapids paper mills.

Before his woods adventure began, Murtfeldt ran across a good-looking gal on the streets of our own River City. She was Helen Stahl, secretary for

Consolidated's head salesman, Walter Mead.

Helen moved to Chicago when the sales office did. Her letters began the long commute north until 1937, when Helen married Murtfeldt and moved to a log cabin in the Minnesota camp.

During her June-through-December stay, a camp employee hauled wood to her stove and brought water up from the creek. For light, there were gasoline lanterns and Aladdin lamps. When she found a bear exploring the yard, Helen screamed and some of the jacks came rushing up with rifles but the alarm had been effective and the bear was gone.

One morning, Larry and Helen heard a persistent barking. Out the window, they saw a camp dog barking up a tree and a bear looking down. The bear would climb part way up and then he'd come down and whap! the dog would run away. And then the bear would go back up the tree.

But bears were not the reason for leaving, said Helen.

"John Longbody was an Indian with a great big teepee and a bunch of daughters," said Helen. "I was up there six months and then Stanton [Mead] thought Larry was looking at John Longbody's daughters and maybe he better bring Larry back to the Rapids."

See May 2005 *Artifacts*, a publication of the South Wood County Historical Corp., for a complete interview with Larry and Helen Murtfeldt.

06-13-05

Father's Day

I think of my father when my left foot hits the brake. He knew there was a right way and wrong way to drive. Using the left foot for anything but the clutch was the wrong way.

I think of my father when I turn left from 8th onto Oak toward the “new” Jackson Street bridge. According to his instructions, there was the efficient way and the wrong way to cross town.

I think of my father when I switch on the car radio: that nutty debate about whether turning up the volume took more power. He admitted he might be wrong, which was the right thing to do. Why didn't I admit the same?

I think of my father when I see Earle Garber, who kindly says “Don” made the right decision when he left the Garber company for 39-or-so years at Consolidated.

I think of my father when I see Eileen Keating. Her husband, Duane, a machinist, and my dad, a welder (who later retired as a “planner”) shared space in the Machine Shop.

The only time a couple beers showed up in our fridge was when Duane and Eileen visited. Even for a Methodist, there was a right way to treat your friends.

I think of my father at the Hotel Mead. How proud he was of remodeling the “old” section. A couple decades later, he shuffled his skin-and-bone self across the Mead parking lot, deter-

mined to order the lunch he wouldn't be able to eat. There was a right and a wrong way to die.

I think of him at the Grand Avenue Grill. He insisted there was a right and wrong way to make toast; and a right and wrong time for the waitress he inevitably flirted with, to serve his coffee.

At the Methodist church. When I turned “adult,” he said it would be right if I paid the \$12 a year it cost to keep my name on the rolls, so I did the wrong thing.

At City Hall. His allegiance to Consolidated may have lost him his seat on the City Council. He didn't campaign because you shouldn't have to.

At the SWCHC Museum. When he installed a section of the old Grand Avenue bridge railing, a steel cable snapped and dang near took off a volunteer's head. Technically, that might have been the wrong technique.

At Engel Fellowship Lodge. For doing the right thing the right way, especially when he supervised work on the building, the local Odd Fellows lodge is named after him and my mother.

On Township Avenue. Next to the old town hall was a similar structure in which he diligently marched the Boy Scout troop. “Forward harch. To the rear, harch!”

Apparently, “harch” was the right way to say, “march.”

At the end of meetings, he had me get the cheap bugle from the frigid back room and play “Taps,” which I did, but

brutally wrong.

On Two Mile Avenue.

When I mowed the lawn, I also had to trim around trees with a scissors and mulch strawberries with clippings caught in a steel tub he had welded. There is a right way for these mind-numbing, sweaty tasks, and that's to get someone else to do it.

I think of him when I see the lone tape-mended snowshoe hanging on my breezeway wall. The judge at Boy Scout Klondike Days had asked, “Did your dad help you with that?”

“Maybe a little,” I said.

I think of my dad when I look at my house, which I couldn't have built without him. He started early and left late, even when it hurt.

I think of him when I look at old fishing tackle in the garage. The first time I heard him cuss, he was fighting a losing battle with a tangled line. I guess there's a right way and a wrong way to untie knots.

I think of my dad when I sit down and open the *Tribune*. I inherited his chair and the need to tilt my head and read through the lower frame of my spectacles. I think of him again when I get up and try to straighten my back.

I think of my dad when I look in the mirror, if my eyes are especially green, bloodshot and sad. Why did his eyes look that way when he wasn't? Never asked him; wouldn't have been right.

06-20-05

Murtfeldt II

In 1938, Larry Murtfeldt, now [2005] at River Run, Wisconsin Rapids, made a reasonable decision. His employer, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. said he could remain in his log cabin north of Grand Marais, Minnesota; or he (and his newly-wed wife, Helen) could come down to the mills here and learn the paper business.

Murtfeldt chose to start work with Wisconsin Rapids mill manager, Clarence Jackson. "My job was to learn every pump and pipe in the whole bloody thing, which I did, so that if we had trouble at night, you knew where the trouble was before you got there."

Before long, the modest Murtfeldt, who retired in 1978, was made "so-called pulp superintendent and head of the manufacture of sulfite pulp." Later, he rose to Assistant Mill Manager, Mill Manager and Vice President of Manufacturing for what became the world's largest maker of enamel-coated paper, headquartered in our own River City.

Murtfeldt said the sulfite mill itself was a "tough project." The digesters had to be "blown off" periodically. Amongst a lot of noise and smell, gases went up into the sky and "liquor" down into the river.

In a telling incident, "the old man," George Mead, called him, said Murtfeldt. "I want you to get right over to [Ebsen] the florist. He's pretty mad; we've burned up his garden."

"I didn't save his plants but we had a nice talk about it."

The conversion from tree to paper began in the wood room. "You get the bark off," Murtfeldt said. "You chop it up, then you have to cook it, and then this sulfite thing. We used limestone and sulfur." The eight brick-lined digesters, 15 feet in diameter and 50-feet high, were prone to leakage and deterioration. Murtfeldt said he was called in for emergencies but Bill Prebbanow was always there first.

"The guys would take a long pole, sharpen it, and somebody'd hold the point right up to that hole where it was coming out and two or three of them would ram it in."

A decade prior to his retirement in 1978, Murtfeldt had a large part in the planning and building of the Kraft mill that replaced the sulfite mill. For the project, Murtfeldt contacted Jim Esselman. "He'd worked in the Kraft mills other places and he knew a lot of other good men, which he brought to us. We had it designed by a company in South Carolina, but overseen by Esselman and his crew."

When he came to the Rapids plant, said Murtfeldt, Consolidated was operated mainly by George Mead and his brother, Ray Mead. The two had been running a furniture company in Rockford, Ill., when George Mead married Ruth Witter of a prominent Rapids paper company family.

Murtfeldt recalled his first meeting with Mead at the Rapids office. Mead's advice pretty much summed up the company's attitude: "Do what you're

told and work hard and you'll get along all right."

"After I came, they badly needed a patent attorney and he trotted up here," Murtfeldt said, of his brother, Harold, who later became company president.

Helen Murtfeldt's grandfather was Frank Stahl, sheriff of Wood County, who also worked at a West Side wagon factory and "had his fingers in a lot of things."

Prior to her marriage to Murtfeldt, Helen Stahl had worked in Rapids for Walter Mead, George's son, until the sales office was transferred to Chicago in 1936, "and I went along."

Walter Mead, she said, "was very kind to me, and very thoughtful and, I just liked him very much.

George W. Mead, she said, did so much to make life more comfortable for others. One Depression year, he had one of the machines make nothing but toilet paper and gave it out to the employees.

At a time when there was no air conditioning, "some way or other he brought ice in, and sent that through the registers, you know, to cool us off. He was always doing nice things like that."

See a complete interview with Larry and Helen Murtfeldt in the May 2005 *Artifacts*, a publication of the South Wood County Historical Corp.

06-27-05

Farm Kid

Are you homesick for the scent of manure? Do you, like me, yearn for the smack of ripe silage forked under a cow's drooling schnoz? A proud cock-a-doodle-doo from the chick bin? A well-placed ray of sun on the kid's golden hair as he races the farm collie (Lassie) to the pond by the woods for an idyllic dip?

Yup, a few forkfuls from the stanchions of nostalgia. You can find a smidgeon of that style of imagery in the newly-published "Farmkid," an attractive and easily-readable paperback from Badger Books, Oregon, Wis.

"Farmkid" is based on the early life of Donald Justin Isherwood, central Wisconsin's most recognized author and certainly one of the drollest.

A number of chapters have been previously published in his Stevens Point *Daily Journal* column, "Ploughman's Inch." As his readers know and appreciate, Isherwood is representative of a breed now diminished in numbers: a genuine tuber-grubbin', John Deere-lovin', aphid-eradicatin', dirt farmer. His crop is potatoes.

Though imaginatively enhanced, the "farmkid" closely resembles Isherwood himself, then known as "Donnie."

During my recent visit, now well past his first AARP discount, he showed me the family farm on Isherwood Road. Here, the original farm kid had cows to milk, barns to clean, silos to climb,

straw to smoke and cats to launch into orbit with a hearty, "Got 'm!"

The narrator is not an exact copy of the young Don; the kid in the book is more astute, according to the author. "I was a wise child but I had fun. Really wise children do not have fun."

"Such a sense of liberation. I find it difficult to imagine comparable childhoods, just being that active and capable of so many choices."

But wasn't it a hard life?

"We were labor-intensive children. I resented it partly but at the same time I was so glad as a kid that I could burn up my energy against something."

Wasn't it lonesome?

"I liked being alone. Maybe there was no choice so I made peace with it. I could take a dog and a .22 and go into the woods and be deeply content, and still can.

"Doing farm chores, it wasn't any big deal to talk to yourself or think to yourself. I learned to sing."

What about kids today?

"The rules of life are different. The environment is dramatically different, the weight of the atmosphere; it's a different planet now."

Can the book be read purely for fun?

"The chapters are short, they're quick, they're in and out. You enjoy it that way. I'll send along a roll of toilet paper."

Readers Digest level prose? Not likely, for the bard of the Buena Vista.

Like his current fascination, "Hank" Thoreau, of Concord, Mass., Isherwood

cannot resist his calling as an uncommon commentator.

On the material plane, Isherwood's houses must have towers. And he presently ruminates in an odd structure referred to as "Mid-State Poetry Towers-Plover": no house attached.

In the same spirit, "Farmkid" might look like a simple book. But, towers are attached.

When I asked him what questions he would really like to answer, he offered a transcendental missile that rose toward the starry skies.

"What is the quest the narrator's on? Is it Biblical? Is it spiritual? Is it mere curiosity?

"The narrator is asking the native questions we all ask but we're too afraid or too polite to say out loud.

"What's God? What am I about? What's the difference between me and a frog?

"They are heathen questions I suppose. Though in truth I am and will always be a seminarian. The right question is whether I'm writing scripture or not and I am."

"The act of understanding life is a continuous strand. When you stop it at a segment saying we have sufficient answers, you do some kind of wrong to spiritual life; you do wrong to life.

"I am part of that evolution and I take it seriously. But not without a good deal of fun. That probably separates me from true seminarians."

07-04-05

Terwilliger Bunts One

In 1963, Wayne Terwilliger and I crossed paths at Witter Field, though he didn't know it. He was manager of the Wisconsin Rapids Senators and I watched a couple games that summer. For me, baseball was a passing fancy. "Twig" stuck with it.

At 79, he has completed his 56th season in professional baseball, the latest as manager of the Fort Worth Cats in the independent Central League. He has been in uniform for more than 5,000 professional games as a player, coach, and manager in the major and minor leagues,

He is now writing a book, *Terwilliger Bunts One* and shares a passage about a year in Wisconsin Rapids.

His early career featured semi-pro play at second base with the House of David team in Benton Harbor, Mich., and professional stints with the Chicago Cubs, Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants, Kansas City Athletics and Washington Senators. In 1961, he managed Greensboro in the Carolina League with the Yankees organization, then switched to the Washington Senators organization.

When the Alabama-Florida League folded after the 1962 season, he writes, the Washington Senators looked for another Class D team. They found one in the Wisconsin Rapids Senators in the Midwest League and that's where Terwilliger spent 1963. The Senators played a split season against nine other teams in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin.

"Our general manager was a rosy-cheeked guy named Elmer Collar who was always smiling, win or lose. I was a little leery of guys like that—I thought there must be something wrong with a guy who doesn't even notice when things go obviously wrong. Then one day Elmer showed his other side. I don't remember what set it off, but one of my infielders cussed at him and Elmer took off, chasing the kid around the clubhouse. I gained a new respect for him. Not long after that, we released the kid. One of the reasons we let him go was lack of speed, which was as obvious on the base paths as it had been in the clubhouse when Elmer almost caught him.

"It shows you something about what a minor league manager is up against, though, when your players are immature enough, or dumb enough, to swear at the general manager."

Terwilliger said the Senators were bad the first half of the season and good the second half, finishing with a 58-62 record. Catcher Jim French from Ohio University came for the second half and "was the sparkplug who made the difference."

While driving up from spring training in Pensacola, Fla., Terwilliger was driving through Wisconsin, when an oncoming vehicle swerved into his lane. He hit a ditch and bounced around pretty good before he got his automobile under control. "I was still a little shaky when I pulled into Wisconsin Rapids, and one of the first things I saw was a bunch of bloated, dead carp lying along a river-

bank. 'Not a good omen,' I thought to myself. But Wisconsin Rapids actually turned out to be a nice little town."

Late in the season, the Senators' team bus hit a Volkswagen almost head-on. "I was sitting in the front with my typewriter doing game reports and I had dozed off, so I didn't see what happened. The impact threw the typewriter to the floor and broke it, and I had glass and small cuts all over my hands and arms from the shattered windshield. We pulled over to the side and somebody said we'd hit a car, so we all ran back and found the Volkswagen upside-down in the ditch.

"I had a little outfielder named Willie Adams who didn't have a lot of talent but he could run and he hustled all the time, and he was one of my favorites. He was one of the first off the bus and he ran right to where the car was.

"The rest of us were standing around telling Willie to watch out because there was a strong smell of gas, but he kept right on working until he could pull the driver out."

Terwilliger said he would not forget a hotel the team stayed at in Dubuque, Iowa. "There was an old steam radiator in the room, and tied to the bottom of the radiator was a long coil of very thick rope. I wondered, what the heck is this for? I soon figured out: it was my fire escape! In case of fire, you were supposed to throw it out the window and slide down.

"The players talked about the 'fire escape' the rest of the season."

07-11-05

Billings: Nash

John Billings should take over this column. Turning 95 on July 21, he's forgotten more than I'll ever know about our fair mediapolis.

Well, maybe he hasn't forgotten so much. The long-time South Wood County Historical museum docent has been interviewed quite a few times, by me and others, because of what he remembers. For example, in our latest meeting, I asked him to talk about a prominent local family by the name of "Nash." A sample of the result is presented here.

In John's words, much condensed.

The Nashes were people that improved the community, and were working for betterment, always. Thomas E. Nash [of the Nekoosa Paper Co.] was the founding father, so to speak. He built the big home that [Consolidated paper company president] Stanton Mead lived in.

Guy Nash was his son, who lived up at 1020 Oak Street. Another son, James Nash, lived next to the [SWCHC] museum in the big white house with the pillars.

A third son lived down the street a block or so, and to my knowledge he never married, a little old man named J.L. Nash. He worked on the section, on the railroad, way back in his beginning.

I knew them as old people already, because they were that far advanced.

Guy Nash was a part of what was going on at Shanagolden. He was the Nash interest in owning that timberland up there in Ashland County. And, then, of course, Guy acquired the cranberry marsh at

Biron. Later years, his son, Philleo [later Wis. Lt. Gov. and U.S. Comm. of Indian Affairs], was involved there.

There was another son, Tom, an older brother of Philleo's, who was killed in an airplane accident.

I knew Philleo because he was born in the same year I was. When I started school in town here, he was in fifth grade with me at Howe School. Philleo played violin and that was kind of unusual for a youngster in grade school. I can remember one class play at the old Howe school that Philleo was in and so was I.

At the Nash house was an upstairs window with a screened platform and a bed for Philleo's sister, Jean, who was at the beginning of a tubercular thing. She used to sleep out there, and it looked kind of funny to us to see somebody suspended in their bed out over the lawn.

In New York City, Guy Nash heard a speech by the man that founded the Boy Scouts and he brought that back to Wisconsin Rapids and introduced it into our city. We ended up with a Boy Scout troop at the Congregational Church, the same church I belonged to.

Guy Nash's wife was the organist. She'd be all over the bench, playing away. It amused us young blades. She was a Philleo. And you know, when you start talking about Philleos, what it does with our history.

Right across Third Street from the Congregational church, was this big brick home that belonged to Lawrence M. Nash, the brother of old T.E. Nash. And, of course, he had several children,

Mrs. George Mullen, Charles, Neil, who was in Port Edwards, Lawrence, Will, George, and they were all business people in the community.

My wife's family and the Nashes were Irish Catholics. They thought the world of the Nashes and wouldn't buy anything unless it was from the Nash family. So, my brother-in-law always drove an Overland Red Bird. My father-in-law had a Willys Knight, and they all came from Nashes.

There were other Nashes and I wish I could separate them for you. There was a Nash family on Fourth Avenue North. And the name was Frank Nash. They had one daughter, Caroline, who was married to George Frechette.

I think of another old Nash that could have been a brother to this Frank. And then he had a whole raft of kids. Can you remember names like Dobber Nash that ran the tavern? And there was Ed, and Joe and Ray and then there was...

I think if you had the means to do it, you could go back in that Nash family and find them all kind of gathered together, because they all came down from Canada to this country through Rudolph, all those Irish, years ago.

I used to hear this all from my father-in-law. And he was one of the same, you know, way back when. And his father came from Canada when my father-in-law was three years old, or something like that.

See the complete interview in the August 2005 *Artifacts*.

07-18-05

Billings: Neighborhoods

He learned which streets were tough as child, friendly as postal worker. John Billings, source of last week's column, knows a lot about this river city, in part because of his excursions as a long time postal worker. For example, he delivered parcel post packages to every part of the city.

Billings' route started downtown on the West Side, with the Consolidated paper company and Johnson & Hills, "because they were the biggest mail-getters in town, and I wanted to get their mail and parcels delivered and out of the way."

Then he would return to the post office several times, picking up mail to fill relay boxes for letter carriers on the West Side, then the East Side and on to the schools. "I'd come back and by that time, I was pretty near cleaned up with my parcel post, and then I'd do Third Street, which was just a small amount, in comparison to the rest of the city."

Third Street?

The neighborhood between the hospital and Grand Avenue, he said, was "for people that made a difference." No snobs, the residents "were all nice people, they were wonderful." The letter carrier with that route, according to Billings, "wouldn't trade it for anything in the world," in part because of generous holiday tipping.

The Third Streeters, Billings said, had originally invested in places like Consolidated and Nekoosa-Edwards and continued to be interested in the stock markets. That's why they were sometimes waiting on their porches for the *Chicago Tribune*.

Many along Third Street also subscribed to *Life* magazine. They were supporting their own cause; *Life* provided a major market for Consolidated's pricey coated-enamel paper. "I think that it came out on a Thursday. And when you got that route, why you had your work cut out for you because those were heavy son-of-a-guns."

Billings lived on Third Street as an adult but he had spent part of his boyhood in the "Green Bay & Western area" around St. Peter & Paul church on the East Side. "It was all railroad people. And, of course, you had to kind of get used to the noise and the banging of trains that would switch and operate all night long. If you didn't have that racket, you couldn't sleep. We'd just go to bed and never even think about the trains bumping into cars and switching in the night."

Other neighborhoods with which young Billings was familiar were characterized by nearby schools, such as Howe on 8th Street, still in operation in 2005 though not in the same building. "Those kids would be together and do things together and lived their lives together. There would be guys like Don Farrish and Donald Schnabel."

A district he and his friends "used to shy away from," centered on Irving School, since closed but in existence. A nearby cemetery, ancient and overgrown, was part of the reason for taking the long way around. The other reason was a group of "older kids that were kind of behind in school, so they were bigger than we were but in the same grade, and so we kept hands off of them I tell you and stayed on our side of the sidewalk.

"And then there was a bunch over around old Lincoln high school, all around the fair grounds, you know, the Witter Field? There was Harold Knoll and the Klappa boys.

Billings said he lived by the Green Bay tracks and went to the Howe School, and had to "run the gamut all the way up to Howe School, and I was literally around that group I just told you about. There must have been at least four Klappa brothers and they had twin sisters and they would all be coming to St. Peter & Paul.

"We would go on one side of the street and they'd go on the other, there was too many of them for us. There were only about three of us from my neighborhood, going to the Howe School, so we were a little cautious of how far we extended our travel.

Of the varied clusters of toughs from 'hoods, Billings said, "You didn't call them gangs. They were just a bunch of kids."

07-25-05

Cantin

According to Lois Cantin, all the world is a stage and that includes a lot of unexpected venues. I wasn't too surprised when I ran into Toto, the famous canine personality, at Joe's coffee shop on Grand Avenue.

Technically, "Toto" was Skip Wefel, now en route to his office, upstairs in the Mead Witter building. The eminent barrister is one of a crowd who have once or twice strutted and fretted through a theatrical production here.

As Cantin had said moments before, Wefel's non-speaking role with her in a 1950s high school "Wizard of Oz" was notable. "I was good queen Glenda," said Cantin. "Ted Olson was the lion."

Did I say that our town is a stage and our fellow citizens are players upon it? The River City troupe is assembling this weekend at the Great Tent Event, marking the 30th year of Wisconsin Rapids Community Theatre.

For Cantin, it began in the 1950s at Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln high school, where "theater was my sport."

Big shows took place in the cavernous field house that served as track, gym and theater. "Certainly, if you couldn't project, you didn't belong on that stage; it was a wonderful training."

One-act plays and musical productions were held in the more intimate Little Theatre.

For the success of the high school program, Cantin credits drama coach Harriet Schleich (Timm). "Even at that

time, she got lots of financing from Lincoln high school for our plays and we had support from the community. Stanton Mead was a regular theatergoer and his wife, Dorothy, often provided costumes for the performances."

English teacher Jan Sisley, Cantin said, was "always involved in one way or other and knew all the plays"

In her personal history of theater here, Cantin includes the early Jaycee production of Miss Wisconsin Rapids Area pageants, then part of the Hopa Tree Festival, and Royal Revues at Assumption high school, "one of the first stages to be offered to anyone with talent who wanted to perform."

Beginning in the 1960s, members of the American Association of University Women provided live "gorilla" theater to 24 schools in the district, through classics such as "Aesop's Fables" and "Paul Bunyan."

"You would load the props up, maybe you had a blue face, sometimes you had a mustache, but you always looked pretty rare when you went through town, considering it wasn't Halloween," said Cantin. "You'd go into Immanuel Lutheran in the big gym or St. Philip's in Rudolph, where the pupils would go up the stairs and down the stairs. We would perform on the landing."

"We hauled our kids with us. In those days, women didn't necessarily work outside the home."

At a Woodside school performance, a girl exclaimed, "That mouse is pregnant!" One of the University Women

happened to be playing a mouse and either the mouse or the lady was pregnant.

Thirty years ago, Cantin said, everything was in place to start a community theater.

"We had a great number of people from AAUW ready to go. We had the new library theater and here comes a talented person, Cathy Meils. It was the right combination at the right time."

Cantin, who has been involved for most of those years, recalled other locals who have gone on to a career in the biz: Twyla Hafermann, Scot Buzza, Katie Cavanaugh, Peter Greyy, Joel Goodness, Scott Delacruz, Jim Olinney and Kelli Cramer. But theater, said Cantin, is not only for those with professional aspirations. Whether it be Skip as small dog, Lou as tin man or Hank as scarecrow, it gives others of our neighbors a chance to perform.

Cantin, by vocation an instructor of nursing, said theater has been her avocation since kindergarten at Lowell school. "They put me on and I could memorize and everybody cheered and I loved it and I said, 'Yes, this is what I want.'

"As much as acting, I loved directing. You feel so good when you've put together something meaningful to people. Everybody works together to put that show on. That's what's fun."

08-01-05

Famous Dave

Happy birthday, Dave. This week in 1955, the *Daily Tribune* said all kids born on “Davy” Crockett’s August 17 birth date were invited to a big party. It would be held in San Antonio, Texas, home of the Alamo, scene of the Tennessee politician’s demise.

“A word of advice, young’uns,” advised the *Tribune*, “a birth certificate or a note from your parents that you and Davy were born on the same day will be required.”

Good luck, Dave.

This week in 1955, 14-year-old David Anderson, having won in Rapids, was making plans to move on to the All-American Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio. He would be escorted by Dick Davis, *Daily Tribune* business and advertising manager.

By this week in 1955, the Rapids municipal pool had not been completed. Some of Dave’s friends beat the heat at the recently-developed recreation area on the north shore of Nepco Lake.

But lake namesake and park owner Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. was about to restrict attendance to its employees only. That meant a young’un like me would have to park his bike behind a bush and sneak down the hill like the king of the wild frontier himself.

The Nepco park story in the *Tribune* was illustrated with artistic photographs by Donald Krohn, who had recently left the newspaper for the paper company and whose photos have been a regular

feature of South Wood County Historical Corp.’s history quarterly, *Artifacts*.

This week in 1955, Lake Wazeecha’s South (Red) Beach: VFW Water Carnival, featuring outboard boat races, two Wisconsin Dells “ducks,” and dance music by Red Saeger’s Orchestra and Junior and His Jolly Do-Boys.

At Highway 13 Outdoor Theatre: Buck Nite. The entire family could see “Night People” and “Jungle Gents” for one dollar.

At the Rapids Theatre: “Seven Little Foys” with Bob Hope. For Saturday’s matinee western, all seats would be a dime.

At the air-conditioned Wisconsin: Marilyn Monroe in “The Seven Year Itch.” Monroe was also appearing in “There’s No Business Like Show Business” at the Rialto in Nekoosa,

At the Palace, held over, the greatest “love story” ever told, Walt’s Disney’s animated “Lady and the Tramp.” It was 25 cents for children and I was one of those who paid it.

At T.B. Scott Public Library’s Reading Round-Up Club: awards for those reading 20 or more books on the “cowboys and horses” theme, presented by A.W. Zellmer, library board president.

Of 54 active members at the West Side Branch and 220 at the main library, a sample of recognized names of my age group: Betsy Brauer, Mary Ann Cwiklow, Jon Gottschalk, Robert Gringle, Jeri Knutson, Nancy Mielcarek, James Peaslee, Marilyn Rokus, Marlene Saeger and Mary Ann Stenerson.

More familiar names from the list

of Robinson Park summer playground program closing picnic contest winners: Craig Skibba, George Zimmerman, Mike Miers and Gordon Dakins. (Note that Jim and Pat Mason had perfect attendance.)

These are my peers; some were pals. Because fifty years ago this week, on Friday, August 12 (a day before that of my Two Mile Avenue sidekick, Bruce Zanow), came my 10th birthday.

Perhaps it was then that my parents presented me with my coonskin cap, a pricey model entirely covered with actual coon hide as opposed to the bald toppers that were common. It had a snap-on tail and earflaps. (I’ll tell you a funny story about that cap some time.)

Coonskin caps were inspired by Walt Disney’s 1954-55 television series with Fess Parker as Davy Crockett and Buddy Ebsen as his sidekick. The show was so successful that the original three part sequence was released to theaters as a full-length movie, “Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier,” followed by a two-part TV sequel and accompanied by the “Ballad of Davy Crockett.”

Texas native Fess Parker now heads the Fess Parker Winery and Wine Country Inn and Spa, near the wild frontier of Santa Barbara, Cal. Parker invites former young’uns to submit old photographs of themselves wearing coonskin caps for display in the Shooting Gallery on the winery and spa website, fessparker.com.

08-08-05

Suffragette City

Women's suffering.
Women's suffrage.
Though both were delivered largely at the hands of men, they represent two distinct conditions, one of which was remedied through the legislative process.

"Suffrage," through an etymology too weird to relate, means the right to vote. Suffragettes are the women who worked to get women the right to vote. Their effort succeeded in 1920 with the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

For a while, River City was Suffragette City. In July, 1920, a month previous to the ratification of the Amendment, the *Tribune's* "Inquisitive Reporter" asked local women, "Are you going to vote for President this fall?" All those quoted responded in the positive. They expected to vote yet had not yet been granted the right to use their first names: Mrs. W.L. Atwood, Mrs. E.J. Clark, Mrs. M.C. Whitrock, Mrs. A.G. Miller, Mrs. L.A. De Guere and Mrs. O.N. Mortenson.

With the likely passage of universal suffrage came an interest in the use of the ballot.

To what was then Grand Rapids came Mrs. Benjamin Hooper of Oshkosh, who, like our own ladies, would

not see her first, second and third names in print in 1920 media. Yet Jessie Annette Jack Hooper, a Democratic Party activist and advocate for world peace, would be nominated for U.S. Senator two years later. Her husband, Ben Hooper, was well-acquainted with the VIPs of Rapids.

A lawyer for the "Bensley estate," Hooper was instrumental in the consolidation of water powers here in the 1890s. He was briefly a director of "Consolidated" in the litigious period before a mill was built, to be replaced on the board by J.D. Witter, father-in-law of George W. Mead.

Mrs. Hooper, state "chairman" of the League of Women Voters, delivered her address, "Learn How to Vote" and "Learn Citizenship," to 150 local women at the Ideal Theatre (now Rogers Cinema). She also spoke at Nekoosa High School and the then-new community auditorium at Port Edwards.

In August, three branches of the League of Women Voters were organized in this vicinity. Elected chairmen were Mrs. Henry Demitz for Wisconsin Rapids, Mrs. Franz Rosebush for Port Edwards and Mrs. Herb Cleveland for Nekoosa. Mrs. Isaac P. (Charlotte) Witter, who lived in the residence that is now the South Wood County Historical Museum, was appointed County Chairman.

Mrs. Witter told the *Tribune* her aim was to secure at least 500 county members for the League. She planned to help organize Marshfield within a few days. The League of Women Voters re-

placed suffrage organizations no longer needed, Mrs. Witter stated. The League was "non-political" in that it was not affiliated with any political party.

The expectation, the "Inquisitive Reporter" found, was that women voters would stabilize the political situation. They would insist on cleaner politics and "a more careful selection of politics." Women would reject radicalism and lend a refining touch and ability to politics.

After the vote was granted, the Inquisitive Reporter was back on the beat, asking women "Are you going to register Aug. 31?" Predictably, the answer was once again in the affirmative.

Mrs. Kate J. Pepin, "Yes, I am going to register."

Miss Fern Walsh, milliner, "Sure thing, I will register. I do not want to miss the opportunity of voting."

Mrs. Angeline Roy, bookkeeper, "Well I should say so."

Mrs. A.A. Arndt: "Without a doubt I will register. I surely want to be one hundred per cent American."

Miss Kate Kammerer, Cashier, Telephone Co.: "Yes, I am going to register. I think every woman in this city should do so."

Miss Jessie Farrish: "Yes, I will register. I want to be up to the times and shall try my best to use the ballot intelligently."

Miss Sadie Dorney, stenographer "Certainly, I shall. I think the women who have ideals should be at the polls and do their duty."

08-15-05

Einstein's Brain

There was only one genius: Albert Einstein.

He looked the part, with wild, grey hair, a scraggly mustache, baggy trousers, well-worn sweatshirts and sweaters over starched shirts. Perhaps that's why I'm so often mistaken for him. At a formal dinner at which he was being eulogized, he told a writer, "You know, I never wear socks."

The Jewish refugee had been in the public eye since age 26 when he (and his brain) presented his "theory of relativity." That was fifty years before his death, fifty years ago.

Neither his demise nor his 1879 birth in Ulm, Germany, should be memorialized, Einstein (and his brain) said. "It is a known fact that I was born and that is all that is necessary."

Einstein was refreshingly goofy; but his brain was a "mathematical marvel" according to an article in the *Daily Tribune*, following the death of both on April 18, 1955, at age 76. The body was cremated but, over the brain, a "mild tug-of-war" erupted. Einstein's son, Hans, had decided the brain and vital organs of the famed scientist could be used for research.

Montefiore Hospital in New York City expected to get the precious glob of gray matter, while Dr. Thomas S. Harvey of the Princeton staff, where Einstein had been employed, insisted it remain at Princeton.

All this was likely embarrassing to the any residual synapses operating in

the brain itself. According to the *Tribune*, all his life Einstein wished to do his work without the disturbing influence of fame.

For the last twenty years, Einstein (and his brain) headed the school of mathematics at the Institute for Advanced Study in the university town of Princeton, N.J. There, he came up with theories that were understood by very few, according to the *Tribune*; but they were written about and discussed freely by those who had the mental capacity to understand them. That probably excludes anyone writing or reading this.

Always happy to talk about the theories but not about himself, Einstein said, "Let every man be respected as an individual and no man idolized. The essential in the being of a man of my type lies precisely in what he thinks and how he thinks, not in what he does or suffers."

A *Tribune* editorial, April 21, 1955, said Einstein's only needs were a pen and pad. "With them he could log the great explorations he made in the realm of the mind. And what a boundless realm his mind was. Luckily for the world, the greatest of these already have been engraved on the tablets of science. They will endure through centuries."

On the other hand, "Five minutes after the great brain of Albert Einstein was stilled, all its fabulous perceptions of the nature of the universe were erased." Most of Einstein had been converted to a pile of ashes that found their way to an undisclosed location.

But what happened to that brain?

The answer is mostly based on a 1978 story by Steven Levy for a Princeton magazine.

After he performed the autopsy, pathologist Thomas S. Harvey, a last-minute replacement at Princeton Hospital, hung on to the brain. But the publicity surrounding the event had antagonized the Einstein heirs, so Harvey didn't talk about it much.

Twenty-two years after the autopsy, reporter Levy found the brain still in the possession of Dr. Harvey at his Wichita, Kansas, office, sliced up and pickled in two Mason jars inside a box labeled "Costa Cider." "The big excitement for me," Levy said, "was seeing those little brain-pieces, each the size of a Goldenberg's peanut chew, bobbing up and down in solution."

Harvey, at last report in his nineties, retired back to New Jersey. Someone tracked him down this year, on the 50th anniversary of Einstein's death.

The elderly physician said he had driven up to Ontario with the brain in his trunk and given some researchers a sample. The last bits went to the pathology department at Princeton, in the doctor's words, "a year ago," actually 1998, said the reporter.

Most of Einstein was somewhere else; but a part of his brain had, in the vernacular of the morons that write about him, "come home."

08-22-05

Bee Bee at the Circus

Now and then we sample the work of “Bee Bee,” 1950s *Daily Tribune* columnist Bill Beckmann for embarrassing tidbits as popular with the populace fifty years ago as they are now.

Like when Joseph Liska Jr. picked up the Sunday paper and found he was supposed to be at a Clintonville concert at that very moment. Naturally, a mad dash ensued.

Like when Emil “Al” Krumrei, working at the post office, picked up a box addressed to 320 E. Grand Ave. “Where do you suppose this goes?” he asked co-workers. “There isn’t an address like 320 E. Grand Ave.”

Al was informed he was employed by a firm, Uncle Sam’s postal department, whose address was 320 E. Grand Ave.

Like when Jack Fritzsinger called Lawrence Carlson about a topic for Toastmasters. “Hello Beautiful. May I speak to that homely husband of yours?”

“Beautiful” answered, “Oh! Well, you must want the OTHER Lawrence Carlson—his number is 1061.”

Like Mrs. Len Sanger, who “had better wear track shoes next time she parks her auto on a driveway incline” as she did on 15th Ave. N. “Within seconds she was seen giving the driverless auto a chase down the drive and across the street. The race ended in a tie as the auto halted at the curb and a breathless Mrs. Sanger took over and reparked it.”

“We understand,” said Bee Bee,

“George Monson will take a final check in the mirror before going to work from now on. Seems his trousers got all twisted up in other apparel, the type worn by women, the other a.m. George wasn’t aware of the fact until he had paraded through the entire mill. He was then informed the underclothing was showing. George turned every color under the sun and retired to his office for a quick change.”

Like William Proxmire at Rotary. He had outlined the tax problems of the state and headed down the home stretch with questions from the floor. Someone asked, “In the minute or so you have left could you tell us just what you would do to solve these problems?”

As Proxmire opened his mouth, there came a loud blast over the intercom speaker with a musical background. “If I ever needed you, I need you now...”

Then there was young Steve, at the Memorial Day parade, being looked after by his father. The two-year-old was well behaved except he didn’t enjoy walking as much as his father thought he should. “Some time during the parade Steve took off a shoe and evidently was more comfortable. When time came to go home, Steve’s father was more than upset to find his son with one shoe on and one shoe off and missing...

“Bet Chet Bell will put double knots in the little lad’s shoestrings next time they go on an outing.”

Some funny stories, like about two old salts, Rounds Metcalf, the skipper, and his one man crew, John Rodencal,

who had a fine time racing and beating some of the fancier boats at Nepco Lake. “When motor trouble developed, however, the real status and rank came into play. There, standing and shouting directions and orders was Capt. (Queeg) Metcalf and there sat and paddled unranked seaman John. Talk about getting caught without a paddle: John was trying to propel the craft with a 2-inch piece of plywood. The pair put on quite a show, but it didn’t last long. The boat has been sold.”

Then there was Bee Bee and son at the circus.

“It was a busy afternoon trying to keep the lad spotting the aerialists and acrobats while he kept his nose in the 20-cent bag of peanuts. The clowns, horses and more clowns performed and the climax, unannounced, rolled around with three elephants going through their paces. Then the man said, ‘Please use the exits at the front of the tent.’

“Bee Bee Jr. looked at me with a question in his eyes. I looked at my watch and said, ‘Yap, guess that is it.’”

As for the sideshows, “After explaining that the fire-eater really didn’t eat the fire, as almost anyone could plainly see from our vantage point, and that the sword-swallower did not swallow the sword with the handle as long as the blade and that he, my son, shouldn’t pet the ferocious lion as one other lad had done, we ambled toward the auto and the trip home.”

08-29-05

1955

As of fifty years ago, our River City was not just getting older; it was getting better.

In just five years following 1950, what was then called the Tri-City area (Rapids, Nekoosa and Port Edwards with Biron and Grand Rapids also included) had experienced a population boom accompanied by a surge of new housing, according to the *Daily Tribune*.

In that five-year period, 942 new homes had been erected, a *Tribune* survey reported, by which they figured a population increase of 2,826 for the area, arrived at in the following way.

The 1950 census had shown the five political divisions of the Tri-City with a combined population of 21,854.

Building inspectors and assessors provided the *Tribune* with figures that enumerated new homes erected in five years:

Wisconsin Rapids, 473.

Grand Rapids, 310.

Port Edwards, 72.

Nekoosa, 58.

Biron, 29.

In order to guess at the population increase from 1950 to 1955, the *Tribune* multiplied by three the number of new homes built on the basis of the 1950 census average of persons per household of 3.48.

The population of the city of Wisconsin Rapids had increased by an estimated 1,419.

By the same formula, the increase in residents in five years for the other communities were as follows, with the 1950 census figures in parentheses:

Town of Grand Rapids, increase of 930 (4,141).

Port Edwards, 216 (1,336).

Nekoosa, 174 (2,352).

Biron, 87 (528).

Further reflecting community growth in the five-year period, *Tribune* circulation rose from 7,744 to 8,307. Of these, 6,823 were in Nekoosa, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids.

Where were these added persons employed, asked the *Tribune*? Two-thirds weren't employed at all. They were school children and mothers, who then were not considered part of the work force. From 1950 to 1954, Rapids had an increase of 557 children of school age reflecting the post-war baby boom.

Beyond that, major industries in the area "absorbed" an increase of an estimated 400 or more employees in the past half-decade.

E.P. Surprison, employment manager of the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co., reported that his company increased its working force 23 per cent in the five-year period, from 1,618 to 2,078.

The biggest single factor was a new paper machine, the company's ninth, at the Nekoosa mill, directly or indirectly adding more than 100 new jobs. Mill employees at Nekoosa rose from 566 in 1950 to 762; at Port Edwards, from 658 to 770. The total payroll was nearly double that of 1950 at \$10 million.

Consolidated had hardly changed in five years. There were 1,459 employees at the Wisconsin Rapids Division, a decrease of 18. The Biron Division employed 714 persons compared to 713 in 1950. However, an increase of 57 was noted in executive and administrative personnel.

But additional employment was provided by several other manufacturers headquartered here. The biggest factor on the labor scene in the period was the 1954 Consoweld Corp. plant that provided employment for 199 persons. Consoweld, with ties to Consolidated, manufactured a laminated plastic-like sheet for counter tops and similar applications.

The impact of Consoweld's growth was tempered by a corresponding drop in employment at Consolidated's Ah-dawagam Division, later called Paperboard Products Division, from 370 to 212 as employees transferred from one Consolidated company to the another. Overall the Consolidated work force had increased by 81 in five years.

Another company of major importance here was stove maker Preway, in 1955 rebuilding after a post-war slump. Preway employed a high of 600 persons in 1950, fluctuated with the Korean conflict and hovered at 500 in 1955. Preway closed its Rapids operation in 1987.

09-05-05

Cranboree Canceled

Fifty years ago, a rotten thing happened. It put an end to an event that glows like a bottle of fine cranberry wine in the reminiscences of most residents over 55. It was an end to the mythic Cranboree, canceled when the local Chamber of Commerce board of directors decided not to sponsor the event again. "Due to the general lack of interest in some quarters, the financial burden which rests heavy upon certain people and upon firms who annually have had to cover expenses incurred in the celebration, and due to several events large in scope and important to our community in the immediate future, and other extenuating circumstances, it was resolved to suspend the National Cranboree for 1955," revealed B.T. Ziegler, manager of the Chamber.

As a replacement, the Chamber board hoped that the opening of the new Jackson Street Bridge be given proper recognition by a one-day celebration with the possibility of a short historical pageant. A centennial celebration in Wood County for 1956 was also referred to.

Only one person had volunteered to be general chairman of the Cranboree and that person was the only one offering any outside help. But also of concern were recent difficulties between the Chamber and Local 610 of the American Federation of Musicians, apparently one of the extenuating circumstances. "I couldn't say that it was the factor for suspending the

Cranboree, for it was a combination of all the other things too, which were considered in making the decision," said Ziegler. "But as things stand now, the Cranboree is still on the 'unfair list' of the AFM."

Martin Lipke, secretary and business agent of Musicians Local 610, said, "We wrote letters to the Chamber of Commerce on April 15 and again on May 1 asking for a meeting to negotiate, but so far have not had any word from them. Maybe it's because the Chamber has not found a convenient time to meet with us."

Ziegler said the Chamber had not been told why the Cranboree was put on the musicians' list and had not been told what had to be negotiated. "The gate to the door for settling this affair has always been open," Lipke said. He repeated that his union had not "blacklisted" the Cranboree, and that "blacklisted" was a term invented by the *Tribune*.

The Cranboree had been held for six years, gaining national renown, according to the same *Tribune*. It had attracted an estimated 60-80 thousand spectators on the day of the big parade. "There is a sense of genuine regret in Wisconsin Rapids, as well as among the community's neighbors and friends far and near. It has, without a doubt, done more than any other single civic enterprise in modern times to put Wisconsin Rapids 'on the map.'"

Perhaps it was the only logical decision under the circumstances, agreed the *Tribune*. "Uncertainty" had been

permitted "to surround the fate of the 1955 event so long that an air of pessimism had taken hold of many who in past years were numbered among the event's most ardent boosters." Certainly, the delay in organizing would have made it a "lesser Cranboree."

The *Tribune* did not accept that the Cranboree was too ambitious for a community of our size; but "too many were too willing to let too few do all the work and bear all the expense." Even worse were those who, "without contributing in any way, shape or manner to the success of the Cranboree" sought ways to personally profit from the event, which "by its very nature was a non-profit venture."

In the what's-in-it-for-us category, said the *Tribune*, was the local Musicians Union, "which helped to speed the demise of the event. We doubt that even the Musicians Union will feel any sense of satisfaction in seeing the Cranboree pass from the local scene. For it did provide employment for union orchestras."

Faraway, in a more cran-happy vein, Vice President Nixon was presented a cranberry pie in Washington D.C. by Mrs. Lester Balthis, Oakdale, Wis., winner of the cranberry pie baking contest held during the 1954 National Cranboree. Nixon promised to share it with his 7-year-old daughter, Tricia, because she liked cherry pie and he thought she'd be similarly delighted with a cranberry pie.

09-12-05

Hospital 1955

Rates were just too high, more than the welfare system could afford. And if other hospitals offered a better deal, it was time to take that option.

So it was that Wood County public welfare Director Harry Precious threatened to discontinue sending clients to Riverview Hospital unless a rate reduction was offered—50 years ago, in 1955. Precious said he would ask the County Board for permission to send local welfare recipients to Saint Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield, St. Michael's in Stevens Point or the University Hospital in Madison.

But B.C. Brazeau, chairman of the board at Riverview, said the Wisconsin Rapids hospital did not believe it "should furnish service at a loss to that department." He said the board's position was the same as it had been five years earlier when Precious also had asked for a special rate and was turned down. "Since this hospital receives private donations to support its operation," Brazeau said, "we do not feel we should redonate the money to the welfare department." Riverview was almost unique in the state in that it operated on a self-sustaining basis, Brazeau said.

Precious most recently had sought a rate adjustment in a March letter to Dr. J.K. Goodrich, hospital administrator. In it, he presented a survey of 108 state hospitals, concluding that the rate here "exceeds the rate charged by all other

hospitals."

Precious questioned whether his department could justify paying "\$10,000 per year more than we would have to pay if we secured hospitalization elsewhere."

However, Precious said, "We freely admit that by nature of the hospitals involved the rate should be higher locally than either at Marshfield or Stevens Point." The hospitals in those cities were operated and supported by the Catholic Church.

Precious said he would withdraw patients from Riverview on June 1 if given County board sanction for the transfers, adding, "There's no person who wants this thing settled more than I do."

Just when it appeared that the County Board would give its go-ahead to send welfare patients to Point and Marshfield, county Supervisor Frank Abel of Wisconsin Rapids said he would attempt to negotiate a settlement. Abel said the issue put South Wood County supervisors in a "peculiar situation" because of the potential effect on both doctors and the hospital that removal of welfare patients to other communities would have. "I still believe this matter can be threshed out so it will be favorable to both parties."

In a mimeographed letter circulated among the county supervisors, a special committee of the hospital board had asserted that "the fees at Riverview Hospital will remain as they are for the indefinite future and that no discounts will be allowed in any situation. On

the basis of our best information, the overall charges at Riverview are not out of line for a hospital of this character today. The hospital should have the full support of every one of you (board members) and it would seem most ill-becoming for Wood County to take any action withdrawing support from this needy institution."

The letter deplored any attempt to "shop around" in an effort to get lower rates.

Abel reported to the County board in July 1955 that efforts by himself and other Wisconsin Rapids area supervisors to arbitrate the fee schedule differences had failed.

Precious said his survey showed that daily room charges at the local hospital were out of line. It's no wonder that he and others in charge of the purse strings were upset. After all, Riverview hospital billed patients (or the county) \$11.50 for a bed in a ward, \$13.50 for a semi-private room or \$16.50 for a private room, plus some additional charges.

More than \$10 for one night! There was a limit to what the taxpayers could bear.

09-19-05

Grove of Trees

A long time ago in a faraway land, a gigantic statue of Ozymandias, “king of kings,” called out from an inscription on its base, “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

Later, according to the poem by Percy Shelley, the same statue, now a “colossal wreck,” lay broken and half-buried in the shifting sands of time. Ozymandias, king of kings, and his aspirations had run up against mutability.

That pretty much sums up the lessons of history.

On Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2005, an impish reader asked the *Daily Tribune* what happened to the trees by Grove Elementary School on the corner of Grove Avenue and Port Street.

Officials told the *Tribune* that, as some trees had become diseased, branches might fall on students passing beneath. Brush under the dying trees also made it difficult to observe students during recesses. To save the imperiled pupils, the trees were cut and sold for pulp. The cash was used to remove the stumps and “re-seed” the area. A few specimen pines worth saving were left in testimony to the ambitions of members of the Grove 8th grade graduating class of 1955.

Fifty years ago last April, they put the finishing touches on a corner post that identified the Grove and Two Mile School Forest and listed the class roll of 47 students. The post also bore an original poem by 8th-grader Paul Mur-

gatroyd, then of 440 Two Mile Ave.

*God made for us the tree,
A wondrous thing it be,
Standing here for us to see
A blessing there for you and me.*

The post was painted by Paul’s schoolmate, Gerry Irwin, of Airport Avenue.

Now one of the Wisconsin Rapids district’s oldest schools, Grove was still wet behind the ears when Paul and Gerry and the other pupils, armed with spades and axes, cleared underbrush and planted the first stand of evergreens.

An April 1955 *Daily Tribune* counted 5,000 3-year-old Norway pines. Future classes were expected to add to the total until the available portion of the school’s 15 acres had been fully planted.

Supervising the planting were Palmer Budahl, principal of Grove school, and Ray Lecy, 8th grade instructor. Budahl said the forest would be used as a conservation classroom in which studies of the trees and soil would be made as the plantation grew.

If future plantings were as large as the one contributed by the class of ’55, said the *Tribune*, the school forest would be completed in four years.

In 1954-55, I was a fourth grader at Grove’s partner, Two Mile school. The next year, as a proud Grove School Pirate, I probably added a few seedlings on Arbor Day. I know I thought fondly of that forest a few times over the years.

Principal Budahl lived around the corner on Sampson Street from my 439 Two Mile Avenue home. When he gave a talk at the local library years later, he said he was proud of encouraging Sand Hill reprobates; but it was apparent he didn’t know me from Pee Wee Peckham.

When he was my 8th grade basketball coach, Ray Lecy promised that, though I was short, some day I would be taller than Harlan Kramer, which didn’t happen, and taller than Ray, which did.

Lecy also chose me to accompany classmate Pat Splitt to the courthouse for a special day of cigar smoke. Later, as principal of East Jr. High, he invited me to join his faculty, though I had no training in that direction.

Thanks, Mr. Lecy.

Paul Murgatroyd had been my friend and mentor as I grew up across the street from him. He and his family were among the best of neighbors.

Thanks again to the Murgatroyds.

Seems like the school forest post painter Gerry Irwin became a drummer in a rock and roll band. When I first tip-toed into the Grove school band room as would-be trumpeter, he was kind to me.

Thanks, Gerry.

They say that, in the all-too-sunny paths of the Grove, gratitude lasts longer than trees.

09-26-05

Mel

This is Mel Laird.”
Hello! Not the first person I expected to hear from on a mundane *Memoirs* morning—an eminent son of central Wisconsin but just as down-to-earth as ever. Long associated with Marshfield, Laird had been the predecessor, beginning in 1952, of current office-holder, Dave Obey, as “our” Congressman.

In 1969, Laird was named Secretary of Defense by President Richard M. Nixon. His challenge was to manage a dignified exit from Viet Nam. Now a senior editor at Readers Digest, he continues to have a major impact here through the Melvin R. Laird Center at Marshfield Clinic.

It was Nov. 8, 2004, that Laird telephoned from Florida to discuss his roots here. His mother, Helen, was born in Wisconsin Rapids, Laird said, noting that the community was then split between Grand Rapids and Centralia.

In 1891, the prospective parents of Laird’s mother, W.D. and Huldah MaryBelle “Mame” Connor, lived in Auburndale but took the train to Rapids for the birth because Dr. George F. Witter, Mame’s father, practiced medicine here.

Laird said that, through the Witters, he is related to the Mead family of Wisconsin Rapids.

“Of course I’ve done a lot of things for the Consolidated. It’s no longer owned by the Meads, which is too bad.

Consolidated was kind of a family company.”

Mel’s father was Melvin R. Laird Sr. “The R is for Robert, same as mine; I’m a junior.”

The elder Laird was born on a farm at Maysville, Illinois, worked his way through Illinois College, then attended Princeton Theological Seminary where one of his professors was Woodrow Wilson.

Laird Sr. came to Marshfield as a young Presbyterian minister. After chaplain service in World War I, he assumed the pulpit at Westminster Presbyterian church in Omaha, Neb. and married former Marshfield parishioner Helen Connor.

That’s how Mel Jr. came to be born in Omaha, Sept. 1, 1922. After a year, the Lairds moved back to Marshfield.

“The records show I checked into the Marshfield Clinic as a young baby in December of ’23,” Laird said.

Back in “Hub City,” Laird Sr. served as secretary of the Connor wood products company. His father had retired as a minister, said Laird, but he filled in at Wausau, Stevens Point and Wisconsin Rapids. He also became involved in politics becoming chairman of the Wood County board and elected to the state senate in 1940, serving to his death in 1946. “He was a fine father, a fine man, a fine leader, said Laird. “He organized the first Boy Scout troop in Marshfield. He was interested in young people, and he was interested in his family. We were very close. My

father gave me the greatest inheritance a man can give a son, a good name and a fine reputation. I was 23 years old, still in my Navy uniform as a lieutenant, junior grade, when the people of Wood County, Clark County and Taylor County elected me to the state senate on the reputation of my father.”

Laird also said he owes a lot to Helen Connor Laird. “Mother was very active, a great lady. She was first woman president of the school board in Marshfield, president of the Marshfield library board and a member of the board of regents of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for nine years. She was on the state library commission and head of the 7th district Federation of Women’s Clubs.

“There couldn’t have been a better relationship with my mother. After my father died, I spent a lot of time with her. We took the train all the way across Canada and stopped at Banff and Lake Louise and made that about a three-and-a-half week trip and got out to Victoria in British Columbia. We had many trips like that.

“When I was Secretary of Defense, I used to call her almost every day or she would call me, giving me advice. She always gave me a lot of advice when I was in Congress too. Sometimes I took it, sometimes I didn’t but it was nice to have her there.”

10-03-05

Tale of Two Cities

Best of times, worst of times. Age of wisdom, it was the age of folly. Everything before us, nothing before us; we were going direct to Heaven, we were going direct to Hell. In short, it was now!

Those sentiments were contained in an old book club version of “The Tale of Two Cities” by Charles Dickens that I found at “Joe’s,” a.k.a. From the Ground Up coffee house. The book had been shelved next to the same chair I sat in last week. But I wasn’t reading; I was talking with one of those out-of-state tourists the multifarious chambers of commerce seek to commandeer.

An ardent bicyclist, Robert Pratt, 60, of Oakland, Calif., had taken a plane to Minneapolis, from which he pedaled here, arriving after dark and in the rain. During this first visit to Wisconsin, Pratt hoped to learn more about his forebears, enabling him to report back to his 94-year-old mother, who had related family stories she had heard of the Irish fold at Babcock.

Among those early settlers were Pratt’s great-great-grandmother, Mary Ann Smith, married to Anthony Hurst.

The Hursts had one child. Pratt’s grandmother, Helen “Nellie” Hurst (later Fitzpatrick), born in 1874.

After a divorce, the great-grandmother, Mary Smith Hurst, married John Sullivan and with him had a son, Arthur, and three daughters, whose married names were Gunning, Card and Lesarge.

Upon arrival here, Pratt immediately

cycled to Babcock, where he found a “pleasant village,” that did its best to help him.

Inez Regalia, whom Pratt met at the Babcock post office, invited him to her house. She served cranberry cocktail and cookies while he used her phone to call Phillip McKeel.

McKeel, Remington town chairman, already had assisted by mail and now drove Pratt to a location McKeel guessed was the old Smith homestead.

Lyle Scott, Babcock cemetery caretaker, located Patrick Smith’s grave, near that of the eponymous H. W. Remington.

Jim Walker, a Babcock resident, drove Pratt to the Seneca Road poor farm cemetery in search of Pratt’s great-great-grandmother’s grave.

Later, with prospects of a late-night bicycle trek across the cranberry moors back to Rapids, Pratt accepted an offer of lodging upstairs in the Frost Watch tavern.

The following day, he visited a Babcock restaurant and met more good-hearted Babcockers before returning here.

Pratt said he had pictured Rapids as a quaint and sleepy mediapolis “and it’s not.”

“I was hoping for more of a walkable downtown with cafes and stores; but a lot of that’s evidently gone, although we’re sitting here in a nice little café talking.

“Rapids is an active community and it’s prospered and it’s grown. It’s got the Eighth Street strip mall, full of com-

mercial activity, with all new buildings and chain fast food places.”

It also has, in Pratt’s experience, locals as accommodating as those in Babcock.

When Pratt took refuge from a downpour at the Food Tree convenience store, a Rudolph resident, originally headed the opposite direction, offered a ride to McMillan Memorial Library, which was to become a home away from home.

“It’s a big library with a lot of information and easy access. The staff is very helpful.

“There’s a very good local history area with census records and genealogy information I can’t access easily in California.”

In the back room of Joe’s, Pratt and I viewed a mural-sized panorama of Oakland’s sister city, San Francisco. “The Bay area is busy with big city problems,” Pratt said. “There’s a lot of activity, a lot of stimulation that possibly doesn’t exist here. People are leery of strangers because of the possibility of crime.

“The pace of life here is slower. People are more relaxed; it’s less hectic.”

As we approached the front exit of the coffee house, an enlarged black-and-white photo received our attention. “That is what I expected,” said Pratt.

The shot of the Wisconsin Rapids downtown had been reproduced from a recent cover of the local history magazine, *Artifacts*. It had been taken by *Tribune* photographer Don Krohn in 1950.

10-10-05

Laird in Marshfield

Part Two

It happened at the big cannery in Marshfield. Call it the Pea Wagon Incident.

"I was young," recalled Mel Laird. "Ellen Roddis and I were out there and we liked to steal some peas, take 'em off the wagon as it went by, a tractor pulling a big wagon full; so we were stealing pea vines and we would sit down and eat 'em and it was kind of fun. I ran out from behind the wagon and bang, I got hit and it ran right over my left leg and most of my right leg but the one that got damaged was the left."

That was the testimony of former Congressman and U.S. Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, who as a mostly-law abiding lad, called Marshfield home.

Laird said the Roddis family and his family spent a lot of time together. His uncle, Gordon Connor, married "the oldest Roddis girl."

Laird was also well-acquainted with my wife's mother, then named Kathryn Kenney. He said she was a smart and attractive girl. Kathryn's father, Bill Kenney, sold Laird his first life insurance policy. "Bill was an insurance salesman for New York Life. And he was very active in the American Legion. He was a great supporter of mine when I came back to run for office."

"Kathryn's mother was a straight-laced person. She liked to give tea parties. When we were in high school

and grade school, she'd have four or five boys, and four or five girls in. She really did a fine job of entertaining and showing us some of the fine things of life."

Laird also remembered former Rapids resident and "Memoirs" subject, Wally Ives, the popular trumpeter. "Wally must have been two years behind me in school. His father was mayor of Marshfield." Laird said he went to a lot of Wally's gigs. "He would put in plugs for me when I was running for office."

Laird didn't participate in high school sports much because of the Pea Wagon Incident, he said. "I had a knee cap that was in two pieces so I had a little problem with that. I tried to play basketball but I was never any good."

A favorite hangout for Laird and his pals was the clothing store owned by the father of Jack McDonald: "Gag's" or "Jack's." "It had a good back room where we used to do all our algebra and geometry and trigonometry and stuff. We used to play cards back there. It was right next to Wayne's drug store that had a nice soda fountain in it. Once we got our licenses, we drove up and down the street."

"I had a good church program at the Presbyterian church there which I was active in. I was active in the YMCA camp in Boulder Junction. I was up there in the summer quite a bit. I was a counselor at Manitowish one summer, when I was in high school."

"I was in the Boy Scouts. My dad organized the first troop in Marshfield in 1908."

"We always tried to get some kind of a job in the summer. It kept you busy and you had a little spending money. I worked at the cheese factory on Vine Street in Marshfield. I was one of the best paraffiners of cheese that you've ever seen."

"I worked pulling plywood at Roddis plywood plant in the summertime. But that cheese work was the toughest job. It was hot over that paraffin. You dipped that big cheese. You'd have to take 'em out and get 'em ready for storage. I did that one whole summer."

Laird said he told his father, Melvin R. Laird Sr., a teetotaler and former pastor, about the first time he tried a beer.

Rev. Laird said, "I'd rather you not but that's a decision you'll have to make in your life and I wouldn't tell you that you couldn't do it."

"I had to tell him," said Laird Jr. "We had a great relationship."

Another item of minor mischief involved playing golf with Bill Copps on a school day when the district superintendent drove by. "Our dads didn't give us as much hell as the principal did. They just kind of reprimanded us, told us they were disappointed and they hoped we wouldn't do it again."

10-17-05

Hank

What Hank sees first is a shock of straw glowing in the sun. Imagine, when he realizes it's the massive hair of a guy on his knees.

"I don't think we better go any closer," Hank's pal Pete says. "He might be a wild man."

"I ain't scared," says Hank, always ready for a dare.

Then the figure, Reuben, stands up tall, his mangy head of hair towering over Hank like a palm tree.

"I heard you invented some things."

"Ya," Reuben says, already friendly. "I can go in and get 'em."

That's how Hank's story begins and none of my former mechanics can tell one better than Henry Nehring, 81, 1320 Apple St. Likewise, no resident of River City has left a more picturesque impression than Hank's comrade, "Old Reuben" Lindstrom.

As previously described here, Lindstrom made an impression on a couple of generations as a proto-hippie long-hair who traveled from rural Vesper to Rapids via a bicycle equipped to ride the railroad line.

By way of introducing the three-way race that would go down in history, Hank introduced his buddy, "Pete Trummer, a Switzer from Nekoosa, who lived on Powers Bluff at one time; they built a farm where we lived."

When Hank proposed an excursion to Fischer's Cycle in Rapids, Pete said, "I'll ride along."

They had both seen an article in the *Daily Tribune* about Lindstrom, who had fled to Canada to avoid service in World War I and had recently returned from an extended stay in the woods. "He lived on Kronstedt road off of F. When we drove over there, the driveway was all mud. So we had to stop at the road."

What Reuben brought out to show Hank and Pete was a little train with fins and wheels that spun, made of tin cans. When Reuben set the device on a plank, the wind blew and the train started going all by itself. Reuben had something similar made out of pizza plates that pulled him and his bicycle along too, Hank learned.

Reuben asked Hank and Pete where they lived and they said "by Arpin." One day soon after the first meeting, Reuben showed up on a little cart.

"It had four wheels and two more behind. When he worked a stick, it lifted up the two back wheels to go ahead. Then two more wheels behind would drop down and that was reverse. With a Briggs & Stratton motor, it was something like a go-cart."

For himself, Hank had an old 50-cent motorcycle frame fixed up with a Maytag washing machine motor. He had found Pete another cycle frame out by "Orbundale" for a dollar or so. "I give him one of my wheels to put in back so he could put a pulley on that; then he put that Briggs & Stratton in there."

The results were soon in coming. Pete won the race, Reuben came in second and Hank came in last. He blames it on

his power supply. "You see, a Maytag, you can't speed 'em up or slow 'em down. There's a governor on the fly-wheel."

After the race, Reuben said, "I think I need a stogie and we better hoist a beer."

So the three lads went to Broecker's tavern in Arpin. Reuben had a few coins in his pocket, given to him by his sister, "the head nurse or something" at Riverview hospital.

"He used to come over to Nieman's to see me when I worked there," said Hank. "He told me that when he was in Canada, him and his brother lived in a cave and ate berries and rabbits."

"Reuben stopped in at Nieman's one time. Herb Nieman says, 'you guys go over by that sign.' He wanted a picture."

"On the sign, it said, 'The only difference is the money you save.' See, it was cut-rate gas."

"Reuben had long hair and Herb had that camera that developed the picture right away. He took one of Reuben that he had laying on the desk a long time."

"He said, 'Reuben, why don't you give Hank a hug?'"

"But he was so lousy," Hank said, these many years later, "I didn't want to stand too close."

10-24-05

No Success Like Failure

All good *Tribune* readers know about the new Stanton W. Mead Education and Visitor center at the Mead Wildlife area north of Milladore. They may not recall that it results from a remarkable failure, a dream of Stanton Mead's father that dried up like a raisin in the sun.

In autumn 1955, the big Wisconsin Valley Improvement Co.'s "George Mead reservoir" on the Little Eau Pleine river was still on track.

An earthen dam almost three miles long would submerge 27,000 acres along the Little Eau Pleine. The project was so big it would equal the capacity of the other 21 reservoirs operated by Wisconsin Valley Improvement Co. along the Wisconsin river. Eighteen miles long, the impoundment would be second in size only to Lake Winnebago within the state.

Lake "Mead" would hold high water during spring floods and be let down during drier periods to maintain the flow at generating plants downstream. About half the contents would come from the Little Eau Pleine and the other half from excess flow pumped from the Wisconsin River. No power plant was planned. Affected would be the towns of Green Valley and Bergen in Marathon county, Auburndale and Milladore in Wood county and Eau Pleine in Portage county.

Opposition surfaced consistently. At an August 1955 Public Service Commission hearing, some conservation and

wildlife specialists wanted the land to be acquired by the state for a public hunting and fishing grounds. Two Town of Green Valley supervisors testified the reservoir would destroy about 15 farms and harm 18 others and that "a stink hole and mosquito nest is likely to develop" near the township school.

A school teacher at Carey School in Green Valley said the reservoir would harm the health of her pupils but upon cross-examination by Improvement Co. lawyer Richard S. Brazeau, admitted, according to the *Tribune*, that the school was located near a swamp and no attempt had been made to drain it.

Four town chairmen testified that their boards had approved the contract for relocation or abandonment of roads. Testimony was also presented that Knowlton township, Marathon county, had benefited by construction of the Improvement Co.'s Du Bay dam, mainly through an increase in utility taxes collected.

After hearing this testimony and others, the Commission approved the project expected to begin before the first of the following year and be completed in the spring of 1958. The *Tribune* called the "30-year" dream, "a long step nearer fulfillment as a result of approval given by the Public Service Commission."

The dream was that of George W. Mead, retired Wisconsin Rapids industrialist, in whose honor the reservoir would be named and with whom visited a *Tribune* reporter at Mead's picturesque home on Belle Isle, just south of downtown Rapids.

Here, Mead said the late L.M. Alexander of Port Edwards, then president of Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co., "planted the idea," in the early 1920s, as the two returned from a meeting of the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Co. at Wausau. "Mr. Alexander told me that the idea of a reservoir on the Little Eau Pleine had been passed on to him some years before by his father-in-law, John Edwards, the founder of what is now Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co."

"Some 10 years later," said the *Tribune*, "came an opportunity to do something about it."

When, in the early 1930s, the Dancy Drainage District went bankrupt, Mead purchased bonds from a Milwaukee bank, giving his company title to most of the land to be inundated. Consolidated would turn over the entire holdings to the Improvement Co. when the last purchases made.

"This reservoir and our new bridge are two of the biggest things that have happened around here in a long, long time. The reservoir is going to be a boon for the entire valley," Mead said.

The *Tribune* called it "mighty welcome news." The public-spirited attitude of the Improvement Co. contrasted with that of some non-resident sportsmen who fought the reservoir "without thought for the interests of the people of this area who are dependent on other things than hunting for their livelihood."

10-31-05

Milwaukee and Vine

They say a stranger getting off the train here in 1905 needed a guide, a camping outfit and sincere hope in his destiny to find a residence in what was then the city of Grand Rapids.

An undated *Tribune* clipping loaned by Gale Jackson, 5561 Victorian Way, shows how order had to be imposed on chaos.

Originally, many thoroughfares were unnamed paths following the river's course. With the platting of streets, lanes, boulevards and avenues, names were needed. Inspiration came in many forms: patriotic gestures to politicians and military figures; descriptors of geographical and municipal features; honoraria for the men who first platted the sections; and copies of famous metropolitan streets.

Here, we had Cranberry Street, which was to become West Grand Avenue.,.

Although the west side (Centralia) and east side (Grand Rapids) had been joined into Grand Rapids five years earlier, the street names hadn't been changed. There were no numbers on buildings in an age when everybody knew everybody else's business.

With the delivery of US mail directly to residents' doors arose a need for consistent addressing, despite the inability of west side and east side to see eye to eye. Some of the duplicate names from 1905:

Milwaukee Avenue and Milwaukee Street on the east side. Park Avenue and Park Street on the west and Park Street

on the east. Elm, High, Lincoln, Wisconsin, Franklin, Main, Oak and Front streets on each side of the river.

Four streets on the west side had two sections, each with different names. Front Street on the east ran into Water Street on one end and into Center Street at the other. There was College Street and no college.

The city council had determined in 1902 that streets on the two sides bearing the same names would add "east" or "west." In 1905, the common council under mayor L. M. Nash went further. Credited with the plan was George M. Hill, a west side alderman and president of the council. Hill had traveled to Denver where roadways on one side of the city were called "streets" and on the other side, "avenues." In Rapids, the river formed a natural dividing line, making the plan even more apt.

The same local resolution split each side of the river between north and south. The dividing lines were Oak Street on the east and newly-dubbed Grand Avenue on the west.

On the east side, the name Vine Street had been changed to Grand Avenue "a dozen years ago" from the date of the article, when the route east from the bridge had been extended up the hill (at present McMillan library).

Changes that were made to west side streets:

Cranberry Street changed to Grand Avenue.

Traveling north from West Grand, Franklin changed to Roosevelt; Wisconsin to McKinley; Elm to Van Buren;

Lincoln to Cleveland.

South of West Grand, the single change was Oak Street to Johnson Street. Also on the west side, streets running north and south became "avenues."

Front became First and, traveling west, in order, disappeared Main, French, Maple, Spruce and Park. The new arrangement eliminated the combined Giddings and Pine streets, which became Seventh Avenue.

Seward and Factory became Eighth Avenue; Banks and Witter, Ninth Avenue; Webster and Daly, Tenth Avenue.

Continuing west, "Campson" (Sampson?), Lyon, Meads (Mead?), Sherman, Dewey, Schley, Houston, Park Avenue, Cottage Grove, La Grange, Central and Daly became Eleventh to Twentieth avenues.

On the east side, Front and Water combined into First Street. Front and Center streets became Second Street.

Main, High, Sycamore, Court House, Law, College, Milwaukee, Broadway, Madison, Seneca, Lincoln, Chestnut, Hazel, Rablin and Portage. These street names were changed to numbers as the reorganization continued through Sixteenth Street.

As orderly as the new arrangement seemed, it didn't mean a stranger arriving in town a century later wouldn't take a while to figure out that the "avenues" are on the west side and the "streets" on the east, a fact some residents have yet to learn.

11-07-05

Imagineer

Any day was a good day for me to draw," he said.
Any time, any place.

Because he is an illustrator, designer, artist, cartoonist, sculptor, architect, historian, steamboat builder, "you name it." He is an "imagineer," the combination engineer and visionary valued by Walt Disney and company. "Anything you can think of; I've got a dozen things I've done in my life."

He is Gerald Matthews, now at 420 Piltz Avenue, Wisconsin Rapids, after a career in California, Florida and the world, in which he designed and drew for theme parks, golf courses, gardens, restaurants, Disney World, Tokyo Disneyland.

Matthews also focused his talents on our own River City, for which he envisioned a larger-than-life raftsman sculpture for the riverbank. "It would give credit to the logger and the person of the period," he said.

For which he designed a walking bridge across the Wisconsin River. And for which he redesigned the downtown to include an elaborate cultural center. "I laid it all out for them but nothing came of it," he said.

Matthews, born in 1928, continues to generate creativity. Among his current projects is illustrating a children's book.

He traces his graphic abilities to a childhood incident. As the toddler Gerry sat in his high chair after a meal, he watched his father, James, execute a

simple sketch of a rabbit. "He handed me the paper and said I should draw one. So I started drawing it and I was drawing it upside down; then I turned it around and looked at it, bingo!"

Grim Natwick, known best for creating the animated figure Betty Boop, inspired Matthews to further pursue his talent. During a visit of Natwick's to Rapids, "my grandmother introduced me to him," Matthews said. "I was very young at the time."

Through the *Daily Tribune* Seckatary Hawkins feature series, Matthews had come to public attention. "Any time there was a drawing contest in the newspaper I'd always do something."

Natwick, aware of the young prodigy, visited Howe school. "He came at Christmas time. Of course, I ended up with the surprise that he was going to be there. The art teacher put me on one end of the stage and he was on the other.

"So I had a little, 'Who's the fastest with a sketch?' and I did pretty well and he was delighted."

Much later, the two met again in California. Natwick was in his last days and Matthews was able to take him out to dinner.

Matthews said he was "well used" during his days at Howe school and at Lincoln high school, where he drew a lot of posters.

During World War II, the Matthews family moved to a farm. He said he rode the bus for a while; then went to a little country school house to "get my classes."

After high school, Matthews entered

military service during the Korean conflict. He was trained in California and Florida, before being sent to Anchorage, Alaska. "I loved it," he said, having adopted the attitude, "This is adventure."

From 1952-56, Matthews, then married, attended the University of Wisconsin on the "GI bill." He moved back to Rapids as a freelancer before being hired by General Electric in Schenectady, N.Y., at a time when Ronald Reagan was company spokesperson.

Besides the Seckatary Hawkins contests, Matthews had other contacts with the *Daily Tribune*. He helped his father with newspaper deliveries, not so bad except in winter and when dodging dangerous dogs.

Hank Silka, of the *Tribune* circulation department, also managed Skyway, a ballroom/skating rink near the community's airport on First Street South. Matthews, on leave from the military in 1949, recalls an evening at Skyway. "The minute I walked in the place, ten or twelve kids that knew me crowded around.

"She was clear down the line somewhere. She kept giving me a big smile."

"She" was Marilyn Westfall, then a senior in high school.

"Once the music was going again," Matthews said, "I kind of walked away and asked her to dance."

They danced and, according to calculations, have been married now about 55 years.

11-14-05

Biron News

There wasn't anybody immune to the threat of that world. We were worried here in Wisconsin Rapids and Biron about the enemy coming."

So recalled Jack Kahoun, now secure in his Lincoln street home across from the high school he attended during World War II. "Hitler was bombing England; the next thing was to take over England." A couple weeks after his 1944 graduation, Kahoun joined the military effort to put an end to Hitler's burgeoning holocaust.

Kahoun had enjoyed early life in and around Biron, which he knew well. He delivered milk on his bicycle and served as a lifeguard in the swimming pool, "when it was down below and we got our water from the cranberry creek that goes underneath."

To get to Lincoln high school, he either walked or took the Biron bus "for a nickel."

Biron had a small village atmosphere, said Kahoun. It also had a strong sense of patriotism. Consequently, when World War II came and young people began leaving for service, the village formed the Biron War Service Club (of which Kahoun's father was president).

Wrapping bandages and assembling packages were popular activities. But perhaps most important was "Biron News," a correspondence that equally informed service-folk, almost all male, and villagers at home. The staff consisted of Eudora Beadle, editor, and Doro-

thy Brandt, Fayth Atwood and Betty Groszklaus, associate editors.

"We can serve them best by sending them messages from home which are laden with the love and devotion we hold for each one of them, whether they are related by blood ties to our members or not," said the *News*. "Each Biron boy is, after all, 'our boy' in the service no matter what his name."

Further, the *News* hoped to "fill the great yearning of the Biron boys, located in the four corners of the earth, for more and yet more news from the home town, which is so solidly behind them in their great contribution to the holy cause for which they are fighting." In a similar vein, Earl Otto wrote: "We let them know in a very pleasing manner that this is 'our' war, not theirs alone... all doing something to get Hitler's hide. We're going to get him and Tojo all stuck up with war stamps, all bound 'round with war bonds. We've told our boys all this and we've told them that we will keep them supplied with news, smokes, cookies, jokes, anything to help get the axis goats."

Most issues of the *News* used purple ink, ditto machine style. Two issues were printed professionally at the *Daily Tribune*.

One version of "Mill Notes" by Granny Weaver counted 95 boys gone to soldiering with more to be leaving soon: Eddie Haydock, Lawrence Kohonen, Eddie Molepski, "Sam" Bodette and Paul Gross.

Meanwhile, "As of old, any noon hour you will find Fred Vidal, Geo.

Cumberland, Walter DeKarske and Gus Beatz down in the Store Room playing Sheephead."

Among activities reported from the Biron Community Hall were bowling, basketball, bingo, pot luck suppers, community singing, speeches, dancing, cards and a costumed band that included Warren Beadle and Phil Nobles.

A 1943 issue said, "Biron is almost overrun with Rapids kids... They come up just about every Friday night to dance or else to see the various girl friends they have that reside in our big town." To further the war-conservation effort, at least 8,000 containers of fruit and vegetables were canned at the hall.

Also busy were the Biron swimming pool, the Biron store and "Joe's" where "Nellie" served up her famous "Bar. B. Q."

Of the newsletter, *Daily Tribune* editor, father of a soldier and Biron cranberry marsh owner, William F. Huffman, wrote, "As one newspaper editor to another, you're doing a bang-up job of keeping Biron's men in service hep to what's what in the old home town. In fact, so commendable are your efforts that the *Biron News* has been made required reading for members of the staff of the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*."

11-21-05

Kahoun

Biron *News*, April 1943: Robert Kahoun finishes basic training and moves on to advanced training. After five jumps from a plane, he will be a full-fledged paratrooper.

May: Robert enjoys a ten-day furlough home before being sent to Camp Mackall, N.C., near Ft. Bragg.

June: Robert's brother, Jack, is to be the life guard at the Biron swimming pool, "so you know where all the girls will be this summer."

"Jack Kahoun deserves much praise for his progress in music the past year. Now he is attending the Music Clinic at the University of Wisconsin. For all we know, he may be a future Harry James."

"During his absences they had five different life guards! They couldn't find a regular."

August: Robert sends a photo of himself hanging 12 feet off the ground from a tree in North Carolina. He says he slipped out of harness, hung on to the bottom of the parachute and dropped to the ground.

Meanwhile, Jack painted the inside of the boy's bathhouse and moved on to working for the village.

September: Biron Honor Roll. Julius Rude, Jr. F 2/c USN – Gold Star. First WWII death from the Biron area.

October: Jack is elected president of the Lincoln high school senior class. He had been treasurer of the junior class. "He really advances, doesn't he?"

January 1944: Robert, aka "Stoney,"

returned to his base Christmas day. "We saw him bowling one night at the hall, but promised not to tell the score. Stoney and Don Ellis had a good old conflag down at the Sugar Bowl until the wee hours one night. Paratrooper vs. Pilot! Sandwiches, cokes, and fudge sundaes, served by the Greek himself, helped lubricate the conversation. Stoney had us all sampling his K rations."

"Did you hear about Jack Kahoun losing his head on the guillotine? A magician visited school and offered to show how the little apparatus worked. He cut a head of cabbage in two with it and then asked for volunteers. Six boys went up on the stage and Jack was the victim."

February: Bob is somewhere in England.

March: Prophecy Comes True. From History of the 1937 9th grade class.

"Robert Kahoun develops a very enthusiastic interest in airplanes and aviation which we hope may aspire him to bring the school some aerial honors within the next twenty-five years."

Bob had climbed to the top of a silo with an umbrella for a parachute but, finding the air cool, the wind strong, and the altitude high, "he frantically grabbed the ladder and climbed back down to good old mother earth, feeling that perhaps he had better wait until he could afford to buy a good parachute before he did much experimenting."

The prophecy said he would be a first Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Corp.: "a hectic ten years stunt flying for the

movies, delivering mail, pilot on transport planes and a parachute jumper."

April: In Bob's words, "After the war I would like to stay home for some time to give us both a rest, you from worrying about me and me to really enjoy the things we are working for now, like sitting in the living room and talking with the family, listening to the radio, playing records, getting bread fresh out of the oven, raiding the refrigerator like I did so much and was so good at.

"It is these things that stand out most in my mind (and almost everyone else that I know) and will be like heaven to return to."

Jack? He has a part in the senior class play.

June: Jack arrives in Milwaukee for induction.

July: Biron is "shocked and saddened" on July 6 when word comes that "one of our own boys, Pfc. Robert Kahoun, had been called upon to make the Supreme sacrifice on June 19, in Normandy."

Another letter is received from France on July 6. It's from Robert. "Try to forget this thing and before you know it I will be back home again. I worry more about how you feel than anything else...God bless you all and keep you safe and well for my return."

Jack gets the news at Fort Bragg, N.C., where he is studying radio communication. Like his brother, he is a soldier. Unlike his brother, he will survive the war.

11-28-05

Mary Hogan II

On Dec. 2, 1954, the *Plainfield Sun* reported four men had appeared in Ira Coon's Justice Court for illegal transportation of a Christmas tree. But a more sinister situation would persist over the Dec. 8, 1954, disappearance of bartender Mary Hogan.

The *Sun* described events that began when Seymour Lester went down the road from his farm to get some ice cream for his daughter at Mary's Tavern "on the blacktop highway, some eight miles north and west of Plainfield," in the Town of Pine Grove.

Finding evidence that someone had been shot and dragged from the building, Lester drove to the George Cummings farm from which town chairman Vilas Waterman and Portage County sheriff Harold Thompson were called.

Presumed victim Mary Hogan had arrived five years previous from Cicero, Ill., believed to have worked as a printer. The Hogan tavern was considered well run and she had a considerable business, said the *Sun*.

Just before Christmas 1954, the state crime laboratory reported blood found at the scene was human. Suspects were questioned and one was held at the Portage county jail, but all were cleared.

Town chairman Waterman was appointed temporary receiver of Hogan's property. A hearing was scheduled before county judge James H. Levi to appoint a permanent "receiver."

Sheriff Thompson disclosed that more than \$3,000 was found in the rear room of Mary's tavern in cigar boxes, plastic bags and purses. A considerable sum, officers believed, had been taken by the perpetrators of the crime. Hogan had deposited about \$1,500 in the bank two weeks before her disappearance.

At the end of December, information was received that Hogan was born as "Mary Curran" in 1901 at Dusenbergl, Germany. A "Mary Curran" was married Oct. 4, 1920, at Springfield, Ill., to Joseph Medved, a miner. She was 19 and he was 34. She left him March 1, 1922, and he was granted a divorce on Dec. 23, 1925, according to the *Sun*.

Mary wed in 1935 at Crown Point, Ind., to Louis Peck and divorced from him in Chicago in 1939 on grounds of cruelty. During this time she used the name of Hogan.

In 1949, Hogan appeared in town of Pine Grove records when she was granted a tavern license. She owned the tavern and a small home behind it which she was remodeling.

In January 1955, according to the *Stevens Point Journal*, the Portage county finance committee rejected Pine Grove chairman Waterman's claim for \$139.92 for services rendered as a deputy for former sheriff Thompson on the Hogan case.

In March 1955, the *Sun* wondered, "Will the disappearance of Mary Hogan last December be written off as one of those unsolved mysteries? A suspect was picked up in a local tavern last week when he boasted knowledge of

the disappearance, but investigation showed he knew nothing about it."

A June column by *Sun* editor Ed Marolla again wondered if the disappearance was going to be "one of those completely unsolved mysteries? So far, it seems to be." The tavern had been reopened and was being operated by Henry Sherman. "But what happened to Mary Hogan is something no one knows, that is—no one except the murderers themselves."

In November 1955, 37-year-old "Harlo G." confessed to shooting an Almond woman in October and was ordered committed to Central State Hospital at Waupun for observation. He had been involved in a string of crimes with a companion not apprehended. Harlo pleaded guilty to breaking into a house, the Prochnow drug store and Pohl garage at Almond.

A similar crime had occurred in Wild Rose. Some wondered if there was a connection among the crimes and who the companion had been.

"Still completely unsolved is the disappearance of Mary Hogan from her tavern almost a year ago. The tavern is a considerable distance west of Almond but on the same county highway as some of the other crimes."

On Dec. 8, 1955, the *Sun* again wondered "What happened to Mary Hogan?"

"Authorities investigated all possible leads, but nothing more appears known today than when the situation was first discovered on December 8, 1954."

12-05-05

Road Kill 1955

As the “50-years-ago” RCM juggernaut crunches along, fragments too short to be published fall by the wayside like dead cats. We call them “miscellaneous.” From the *Daily Tribune*, spring and summer, 1955, the following bits of road kill.

- “An air of extreme obstinacy in the attempt by Clarence Teske and the West Side Civic Assn. to force their will upon the city of Wisconsin Rapids by obstructing the project for construction of a new municipal swimming pool.” So described a *Tribune* editorial regarding Teske’s pitch for a small pool on each side of the river.

Tribune: “Our city is not so big, either in population or in area, that one modern, well-equipped pool cannot serve its needs adequately for many years to come.” The east side pool under discussion is gone now and the remaining pool is indeed on Teske’s west side.

- Assumption high school: Among 33 in the first graduation class: Gregory Kulas, valedictorian, and Le Roy Love-see, class president.

- St. Luke’s Lutheran Church: to build at 10th Street S. and Wood Avenue, Rev. L. F. Schneider at helm.

- Highway 34 between Rudolph and Rapids: relocation of a 5.6 mile portion beginning south of Nash Road and extending north to merge with the then-existing route. (Eliminating the wide curve following what is now Reddin Road.)

- Planned, in 90-degree heat at a city hall with no air conditioning, a one-day

celebration for the official opening of the new Jackson Street Bridge, including speeches by Mayor Nels M. Justeson and others.

- Controversy. Walter L. Mead, Oconomowoc, to blacktop Riverwood Lane at his own expense without curb and gutter, contrary to a city ordinance. On behalf of Mead, Atty. Richard S. Brazeau said Mead had previously agreed with mayor C. C. Knudsen on a plan to maintain Riverwood’s country-like atmosphere. So Mead had sold several lots along the lane with assurance that no curb and gutter would be installed, “ever.”

- To reduce the flow of sulfite liquor waste into the Wisconsin River, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co.’s new soil filtration lagoon on Hunter’s island.

- Warren Lensmire, principal and librarian of Pulaski community schools, appointed principal of Wood County Normal School for the 1955-56 year, to succeed Edwin B. Corrigan, who had been in place one year.

- Junior historical society, from Hazel Gemberling’s fifth and sixth grade combination room at Howe school, included officers Susan Wefel, Peter Leder, Alan Norman and Larry Davis.

- “Faultlessly attired in colorful finery. . . a bevy of senior high school girls . . . descended upon the Elks Club.” Guests of the American Association of University Women at their annual Senior Spring Tea, where Miss May Roach, Stevens Point, cited motherhood as one of the greatest careers but, “You may well do something worthwhile while you’re waiting.”

- Mrs. Alex Budzinski, “an attractive, young housewife,” stepping outside her home in Rapids when something palm-size fell out of the sky. Was it a meteorite?

- An air raid alert that hardly anyone noticed. The community-wide civil defense test “not an unqualified success” according to civil defense director A.J. Midthun.

- Jere O’Day, “veteran local stock car driver” winning most honors at Crowns Speedway before 1,400 fans.

- Sign-carrying pickets from Local 722 of the Motion Picture Projectionists Union at the Highway 13 Drive-In Theater as the theater opened for the summer. Other union members checked license numbers of the 300 cars going through the entrance.

- Fred Beell, who won three world wrestling championships before retiring in 1919 to Marshfield as a police officer and was killed in a 1933 robbery of the Marshfield brewery. In April 1955, his killer, Elmer Dingman, 54, died at home in Appleton. He had been released on parole in 1951. Later, his sentence was commuted by the governor.

- President Eisenhower’s plans for the world’s first man-made satellites.

Tribune: “We are living in an utterly fantastic age. The splitting of the atom was enough in itself to make our age the most amazing (as well as the most precarious) in all the long history of mankind.”

12-12-05

Bixmas

December 19. Only six shopping days left and, more to the point, 700 words due this afternoon. Ever since Johann Gutenberg Xeroxed his first issue of the "News," correspondents have found themselves up against a deadline - for the umpteenth cornball Christmas column. Throughout the Age of Aquarius, my colleagues thumbed through December issues of *Women's Day*. Now, savvy 21st Century pundits fire up the Internet "search engine" Google.

Accordingly, in the spirit of the "Times," I ditch my wife's magazines and grab the mouse. A couple squeezes later, citations pop up for the following words, stated in millions:

Christmas, 250; "Xmas," 17; Jesus, 73; Christ, 49; Easter, 36; savior, 7.

Walmart, 22 (million); Wal mart, 39; bargain, 80; Ebay, 160; Santa, 221; DVD, 386; money, 780; shopping, 884.

Satan, 12; devil, 48; casino, 54; sin, 89; coffee, 142; sex, 220; golf, 251;

Michael Jackson, 12; Beatles, 19.

God, 172; Mammon, 1.2.

Hypocrisy, 12.

It doesn't take a Buber to know that, in 1955, our culture took the "Christ" out of "Christmas" and moved on to something less dogmatic. (Not so often mentioned, we also deleted the "mass.")

As far as replacing communion with commotion, it's another case of "Got 'm!" Add all the petty bickering lately and clerics agree that a fresh start is needed.

Consider my modest proposal. "Bixmas."

The concept is fresh and innocent; it hasn't been corrupted into something unrecognizable; and the word itself has not been done to death. It turned up a mere 132 Googles.

Almost all were for "Bixmas 2002," explained as follows: "Bioinformatics and Multi-Agent Systems Workshop to be held at the First International Joint Conference on Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems, July 15, 2002, Bologna, Italy."

A simple "Bix" brought up 1.7 million sites. "Beiderbecke" accounted for 300,000.

According to the Des Moines Register and a "Bixography" by Albert Heim, Leon Bismarck Beiderbecke was a heck of a musician. Born in 1903, he grew up in Davenport, Iowa. Even at age two, Bix showed how he would rise above the family's lumber yard.

Able to plunk out "Yankee Doodle Dandy" on the family piano, he soon became known as a prodigy. At 15, he taught himself cornet. His zeal for music above all else got him kicked out of Davenport High School and Lake Forest Academy in Illinois.

By summer 1921, he played locally with several bands, including his own Bix Beiderbecke Five. In 1924, he was playing cornet with the then-famous Wolverine Orchestra.

Bix played with the patriarchs of his era: band leaders Jean Goldkette, Frankie Trumbauer and Paul Whiteman; trumpeter player Louis "Satchmo"

Armstrong; singer Bing Crosby; and singer-composer Hoagy Carmichael. Best known recordings are "Singin' the Blues," "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" and "Jazz Me Blues."

His own creations: "In A Mist," "Davenport Blues," and "In the Dark."

Like others of his nomadic tribe, Bix ruined his health, through over-devotion to Prohibition gin. His last gig took place in 1931 at Princeton University. But Bix had played with a bad cold. He died of pneumonia a week later in New York City. He was 28.

Bix was taken home to Davenport's Oakdale Cemetery, once managed by his brother Charles, who was able to escort fans to the grave, where Charles remarked, "It is amazing; he is nearly as popular in death as in life."

Oblivious to worldly concerns such as time, money, health, personal appearance, and shopping, it was through music, according to his disciples, that Bix "wrought his everlasting legacy." A Grammy Hall of Fame award came in 1980 and his records still find buyers.

How should the new holiday be celebrated?

Naturally, heaven and nature will "sing" their harmonious chorus through the instruments of mankind, from classical strings to church choirs to the electrified keyboards of our decadence.

Sound the bugle, beat the drum and ring them bells. "Bix lives!" So proclaim the true believers. He will hit high C for peace on earth and good will to man, as long as there is a Bixmas.

12-19-05

Last Little Indian

Ten Little Indians.” In the Agatha Christie mystery that borrows its title from a nursery rhyme, ten individuals are invited to an isolated place only to find that an unseen person is killing them one by one.

Ten.

That’s how many blood-related aunts and uncles I had when my youngest daughter was born, 16 years ago. Only one was missing, Earl, knocked off by scarlet fever in his childhood.

Until my dad’s oldest brother breathed his last at his Menasha, Wis., home. Lung cancer. No, he never smoked. A carpenter, Roy had constructed a motorboat out of wood in which he had taken us fishing on Nepco Lake and Lake Winnebago.

Then there were nine.

Until my mother’s oldest sister fell to chronic internal problems, at Black Creek, Wis. She had been a house-keeper for a funeral home family prior to marrying the town constable. For Christmas, then “old maid” Mildred gave us books like “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” and on every visit, a handful of miniature Hershey candy bars to eat in the car on the way home.

Then there were eight.

Until my mother’s brother died in Santa Maria, Cal. He didn’t get along with his parents and hardly ever came back. Willard loved and played jazz music.

Then there were seven.

Until my dad’s brother died in Waxhaw, N.C. A Wycliffe Bible translator,

Ralph showed us slides of his life in Mexico. In high school, they had called him “Prof.”

Then there were six.

Until my mother’s brother died in Madison, Wis. After WWII, the GI bill, and graduation from U.W. he enjoyed success as an inventor/engineer and, at the time of his death, lived in Verona, Wis. Gordon didn’t much like to talk about his miserable life on a Depression-era farm.

Then there were five.

Until my dad’s brother died in Princeton, Ill., a couple years ago. Early attempts as a preacher had proved too stressful so he drilled wells instead. Seemed to carry the typical reserve, but, after his brain operation, if you asked him a question, Wallace talked a mile a minute.

Then there were four.

Until, three months ago, my dad’s sister died in a Seymour, Wis., nursing home. Parkinson’s disease had locked up everything but her eyes, and finally, they shut. To her nephews, it seemed Grace had lived like a nun; but in her retirement from the feed store, she traveled the world wide, and, with satisfaction, noted species of birds she hadn’t seen before.

Then there were three.

Until, two months ago, my mother’s sister was found by my cousin, lifeless on her couch at home in Menasha. No one cared more about our family history than Aunt Florence. That’s probably why she was so lonesome.

Then there were two.

Until last month, when my dad’s brother died at 92 in his Seymour farm home. His first wife died in the 1940s leaving him with three kids, and the death of a second wife in the 1980s meant caring for two more; but after a third marriage and a new Hawaiian shirt, Fred had looked happy.

Now there is one.

My dad’s brother, 90, in Texas. Wilmer is the last of the “greatest generation.”

Four.

That’s how many grandparents I had.

Until my dad’s mother died in the 1940s, too early for me to know her.

Three.

Until my dad’s father died at Bellin Hospital, Green Bay, in the 1960s.

Two.

Until my mother’s father, a farmer at Seymour, died in a Menasha nursing home.

One.

Until my mother’s mother died in the same Menasha nursing home, after years of silence.

Two.

That’s how many parents I had.

Until my handsome, happy-go-lucky dad died at age 72 at the Marshfield hospice of lung cancer. No, he did not smoke.

Then there was one.

Until my kind, still-mourning mother, 78, died suddenly at home.

So it is in the second half-decade of the new millennium; when there’s a ghostly figure in a family photo to put a name to, there’s nobody older than me to ask.

12-26-05

Laird III

Like father, like son.

Before World War II, former Congressman and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird Jr. had been initiated into politics by his father, Melvin R. Laird Sr., a successful Wisconsin state Senate candidate for whom Mel campaigned in 1940. "I was just finishing high school that year. I worked awfully hard in that campaign, went door to door every place from Neillsville to Wisconsin Rapids."

But a campaign of a different sort came, when Mel and his older brothers joined the Navy. "Connor did it on the Monday after Pearl Harbor, my brother Dick about two months later and I about three months later. So we all went into the Navy approximately at the same time. My oldest brother, Connor, was killed in the service. Dick came back OK. I was almost three years in the Pacific: Okinawa, Leyte, Luzon, all of those."

Laird, who served on the destroyer Maddox DD73, returned to take, at age 24, his father's place in the state Senate. "I had a lot of supporters after World War II. Carl Otto [*Daily Tribune* editor] was one of them. There was a guy that worked at the paper by the name of Felker. He was from Marshfield. He helped me sometimes with speeches and ideas and so forth.

"Bill Huffman Sr. always supported me. His son thought I was a little too conservative. My relatives in Rapids were all supporters, like Emily Baldwin, and Henry. And Roy Potter and all

those county board member; they were out working for me like the dickens. The Brazeaus were great. Even Philleo Nash supported me, and he was a big Democrat.

"I never lost Wisconsin Rapids and always carried it big. I carried Wood County big always.

"Otto Zieher was a great supporter. Glen is Otto's boy. Otto was on the county board with my dad. Those county board members were all great friends of my dad. Those town chairmen loved him because he was such a good leader and such a thoughtful man.

"During the Depression, people would come to our house for aid and support. My dad always would find something for them even if he had to give them a handout. During the bad part of the Depression, Reuben Connor (a relative) was running the county welfare program to take care of people the best they could.

"We used to go over to Wisconsin Rapids to see the Mead family. That's when George lived out on the island, the old man. George Mead I was a pioneer, like D.C. Everest was up in Rothschild.

"D.C. came up there as a lumberjack on the river and built the Marathon paper company. D.C. was probably my greatest supporter. He knew my father, and he knew my grandfather. He was the man that called me and said, 'Mel, you're gonna run for Congress, and I'm gonna support you 100 percent. I'll raise the money, but I want a good treasurer that you can trust.'

So he gets in touch with Carl Jacobs in Stevens Point and he gets that young attorney who was my classmate in high school, Bob Froehlke, to come up. That's how we got that campaign going.

"In 1952, I ran for the House. I had four opponents, [including] Malcolm Rosholt and a guy who was the head of the cheese makers union.

"Chet Krause down in Iola started out with a little paper. I remember going in and seeing Krause in that little Iola print shop. He was actually putting that paper together by hand. He supported me and it was a hard job for him because he liked Malcolm, too."

In 1959, Vice President Richard Nixon appeared here for a testimonial to Laird at Lincoln Field House followed by a dinner at Assumption High School. Laird said that everybody ate a lot of cranberries that night because the cranberry crop had just been "banned" because of possible contamination by the herbicide, aminotriazole.

"You'd have to eat about two barrels of it to get sick, so I was able to convince the Congress to indemnify the growers for their crop that year and I got reimbursement for them when they burned it."

Like his father before him, Laird always has taken pride in being there for his constituents in their time of need.

01-02-06

Lineup

What did they have in common?

Sherri Baldwin, 17, 1620 Woodbine Ave., senior at Lincoln High School.

Nancy Schmidt, 20, 940 Wylie St., interior decorator at Wisconsin Rapids Drapery Co.

Joan Sickles, 19, 410 Ninth Ave. S., graduate of LHS.

Karen Kinsman, 17, Nekoosa, senior at Assumption High School.

Linda Brundidge, 21, 1011 Township Ave., employed at the Daly Drug Co.

Carol Manders, 17, LHS senior (daughter of coach Phil Manders).

Antoinette Peplinski, 18, employee of Hardware Mutuals, Stevens Point.

Sandy Reddick, 17, 2730 Eighth St. S., senior at LHS.

Sally Sanger, 19, Nekoosa, dental hygiene student at Marquette University.

Donna Christensen, 20, Arpin, teacher at Dairybelt School.

Elaine Coon, 18, 720 Daly Ave., employed by Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co.

Elaine Dallman, 20, 1241 Washington St., student at Wisconsin State College, Stevens Point.

Joann Ellis, 18, 430 Seventh St. S., senior at LHS.

Barbara Sparks, 18, Arpin, senior at Pittsville High School.

Fourteen young ladies with the same goal, guests at a banquet in the South Pacific room of the Hotel Mead on Thursday night, Aug. 18, 1955.

The judges: Mrs. June Lee Haertel, Wisconsin Rapids; Ben D. Sisson, Milwaukee, state Jaycee president; Carl Turner, publisher of the *Waupaca County Post*; and Joseph A. Bors, Washington D.C., newspaperman.

The decision was sealed in an envelope and taken to Rapids police headquarters until Saturday. Who would be queen?

Queen of what? The world's hardest working natural water course. "Miss Wisconsin River."

To her would go \$100 in cash, a trip to a Milwaukee Braves baseball game, a piece of luggage from Gift & Luggage Shop and dinner at "the Lake Aire."

Queen Nancy Schmidt was crowned by Rep. Melvin R. Laird, Marshfield, for the dedication of the Jackson Street Bridge, an "epochal event" according to the Aug. 22, 1955, *Daily Tribune*. The bridge was not only a new artery of traffic but "a further unifying force in the community," a reference to the feud between the west and east sides.

The bridge was the culmination of a project that began in 1950 with a comprehensive traffic survey. Construction began in July 1954 and was completed the following summer.

With one bridge in a city divided by a river and the major industry on the west side, traffic congestion had become acute, especially when shifts changed. There also was danger of an emergency during peak hours. The single city fire station was on the East Side.

The name came from a winning entry by Mrs. Hugh Damon for which she

received a piece of luggage from Johnson Hill's and a \$20 savings account at the First National Bank. "It follows the pattern set up in naming the Grand Ave. bridge," she said. "As the city grows and it becomes necessary to build another bridge south of these bridges, this bridge can then also be named correspondingly."

The bridge dedication pageant substituted for the canceled Cranboree. Spectators lined both bridges for the procession, led by the South Wood County Boy Scout drum and bugle corps from the west-side market square across the Grand Avenue Bridge north on Second Street and over the newly named Jackson Street Bridge. Grand Rapids band uniforms "came out of mothballs" and the Nekoosa Legion-VFW drill team performed.

An ox-drawn Conestoga wagon, a mule-drawn prairie schooner, a surrey and a stagecoach pulled by four white horses in which Mayor Nels M. Justeson was riding escorted a brand-new 1955 convertible carrying "Miss Wisconsin River" and her court.

Log rafts and canoes passed below and a parade above portrayed the evolution of transportation. T.W. Brazeau reminisced. Mrs. Damon smashed a bottle containing river water. Fireworks exploded over the river and Mayor Justeson snapped a ribbon, allowing the future to go forth.

Note: Sunday, the temperature dropped from 103 degrees to 59 at night, a 44 degree difference.

01-09-06

Hurlbut

He is the coach who started the most successful athletic program in Wisconsin Rapids history. The coach with a winning streak that extended for four years. The coach whose wife did the team laundry and went out to buy athletic tape when it ran short.

The coach who, fresh out of college, got the call from Lincoln High School Principal Aaron Ritchay to teach math and begin a high school wrestling program here. He was the coach who coached me: Ken Hurlbut.

As a high school senior, I never had “gone out for” a sport. With so many of my friends on the wrestling team, I decided to give it a whirl.

Being a jock-for-a-season was fun. It relieved me from gym class and gave me a chance to beat up on Pee Wee Peckham and Dan McGlynn.

Surprisingly, Rapids wrestling was only seven years old in 1962-63. It had begun with a reorganization of the Lincoln coaching staff. When Phil Manders, head football and basketball coach for 10 years, resigned in 1955, his coaching duties for the following year were split between Bernard Knauer, football, and Al Duhm, basketball. That’s when Hurlbut was named assistant football coach and Lincoln’s first wrestling coach.

Hurlbut had been an all-star football player and wrestler at P.J. Jacobs High School in Stevens Point at a time when the latter sport was just getting started. The WIAA sponsored its first tourna-

ments in 1940; Point’s own program began in 1946 under John Roberts.

In 1952, Roberts moved on to the Central State College, also in Point, and started a wrestling program there. Hurlbut followed the same pattern. At P.J. Jacobs, under Roberts, he wrestled heavyweight his sophomore and junior year and at 177 pounds his senior year.

He and his younger brother, Dave, had a pact “that we would never try for the same weight class. We flipped a coin: whoever lost, had to starve.”

Hurlbut wrestled as a freshman at Lawrence College, but returned to “Central State,” where he played football, sang in the glee club and presided over the senior class. By the time Hurlbut graduated in 1955, the Rapids School Board, according to then-member Donald Farrish, 96, 1010 Baker St., was ready to bring in wrestling and indoor track. “We had the facilities, and I thought we should take advantage of them,” he said.

The new coach found he would be competing in one of the biggest gyms in the state, although his wrestling room was converted storage space in back.

“I was the only wrestling coach, so I would coach the freshmen from 4 to 5 and the sophomores would come in and work with the freshmen for a while; then the varsity would come in later.”

On the team that first year were Lannie Anderson, Ron Verjinski, Ken Graesser, Ken Reinicke, Dean Dix, Ron Schooley, Jim Saeger, Charles Wittenberg, Alan Bassuener and Herb Jackson. The first competition was a practice ses-

sion against Antigo that ended in a tie as did the first meet, with D.C. Everest, Jan. 18, 1956. “The result was satisfactory, if not completely pleasing to Coach Ken Hurlbut,” consoled the *Tribune*, “as the Everest wrestlers have a year’s experience edge on the Red Raiders.”

“I think I was a competitor by all terms that fit it,” Hurlbut said. “I worked hard with the kids and they performed well.”

At a University of Illinois wrestling clinic, said Hurlbut, Bill Reeves, a former Rapids wrestler, was demonstrating moves. Seeing Hurlbut in the stands, he remarked to the crowd: “Everything I am going to tell you I was taught by that man up there.”

Hurlbut left in 1963 for Evanston, Ill. He retired in 1988 and moved to his present home on the Waupaca chain of lakes.

He always has been a proud coach and one who may always grapple with certain setbacks, like the first loss after a long string of wins. “They barely beat us, and I was really disgusted,” he said, adding, with the perspective of almost half a century: “My wife came over and made some comment about, ‘It’s not so bad. It was close.’”

“I told her, if she couldn’t think of something sensible to say, not to say anything. Later on in the season, we went over to their school and wrestled them in a dual meet and beat them something like 38-5.”

The earlier loss, he said “was just one of those nights. It had been our turn to lose, I guess.”

01-23-06

Benitz

When Rapids wrestling coach Lewie Benitz was hired in 1966, he imagined a grand entrance via West Grand Avenue. “I visualized coming in by that root beer stand and the people waving.” It would be a few years before anything like that happened.

What Benitz knew of Wisconsin Rapids he had heard from two Lincoln High School graduates: Dale Dix, like Benitz, a member of the Stout college wrestling team; and Benitz’s sometimes opponent, Larry Ironside of UW-Madison and Stevens Point.

Benitz arrived here when wrestling was in the process of being adopted at schools across the state. As a high school senior in 1958-1959, on the first Boyceville team, he finished “undefeated,” he said.

“I was 3-0.”

Benitz had just turned a baby-faced 17 when he played football at Eau Claire teachers college before dropping out to work on the family’s farm. After a year, he enrolled at Stout state college, Menomonie, where he joined the wrestling team.

Later, while Benitz pursued a master’s degree at Stout, the local Menomonie high school wrestling coach was injured. Benitz “inherited” the job and a squad of kids good enough to win the Big Rivers Conference. He could have stayed at Menomonie with his wife, Joyce, and son, Scott, but it was time for a fresh start.

Finding an ad for a driver education teacher here, Benitz called to see if the position could include that of wrestling coach. Schools Superintendent Ray Clausen told him Lincoln wanted an experienced coach who could bring the program back to the level it had enjoyed under Ken Hurlbut. “Later on, I found out the guy they were trying to get was Norris Hattlestad, who was coaching down at Richland Center,” Benitz said, “and then he went to Merrill and we ended up rivals for a long time.”

After biding his time on a construction job that summer, Benitz got a better offer from Clausen: driver ed and assistant wrestling coach. “Young and stupid,” Benitz declined. “I wanted to coach.”

A couple weeks later, after football practice had started, Lincoln coach Roger Harring called. “I think I can help you get that wrestling job if you will help me with the football team.”

Harring’s ploy was successful, and Clausen called again. “You’re a stubborn young man; you got a job.”

Needing to transfer their possessions to Rapids, Benitz turned to a family friend on a nearby farm. “I went out there and asked him if we could borrow his cattle truck. We washed it out, threw in the little stuff we had, and that’s how we moved here.

“I was in awe of the size of Lincoln.

“I had an office up on the third floor in a broom closet I shared with a janitor. Bob Marx, Gary Campbell and I would carry our stuff down to the little

theater and teach. Our wrestling room was a chair storage room on the south side of the field house. We had 100 kids out that second year and there was no place to put them, so we’d go in shifts.

“Just being around guys like Mr. [Dale] Rheel and Cepek and Roger Harring; here I was, a little kid off the farm who had a chance to rub elbows with some really great coaches.

“A lot of the stuff I learned on coaching I learned from Rog. He would always say, ‘I want to surround myself with good people.’ Roger was always fair and he could keep things in perspective.”

Benitz said he also learned a lesson or two from athletic director Charles Swartz, “like patching uniforms if they could be patched. I wanted to get some new uniforms that second year and he said, ‘Does your wife do some sewing?’

“When I came here, I don’t think there could have been a better fit than a green, redneck farm kid in a blue-collar town at a time when they’d had a good wrestling program that had slipped a little bit.

“I was always the kid, always the boy. I was smart enough to sit back and listen. So many things I missed that I thought other people knew. Then one day I came to an in-service meeting in the fall, sitting by Denny Nelson, looking around, and I whispered, ‘Denny, I’m the oldest guy here.’

“Just like that, it happened!”

01-30-06

Benitz: Sorry

Lewie Benitz, Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln wrestling coach (edited):

“When I was that little boy going into ninth grade, I asked my dad if I could go out for football. My brother came and talked to him because my brother had not been allowed to go out and after a long time, Dad said, ‘You can go out for football but you’re going to milk cows before you go to school and after you get home.’

“I said, ‘Thank you.’ I was happy.

“When I dropped out of Eau Claire college right after football season, I was still a boy still wishing I could be in high school. My dad never said anything; but he bought this ‘40’ that had been owned by an old codger who had passed away. There were some old buildings and a lot of elm trees. Most of it was swamp.

“We cleared it that winter. Took a tractor and trailer and went down and cut wood all day. Then we got a lumber guy in with a saw rig and we made lumber in the spring.

“He knew all that elm lumber was no good. I don’t care how you stack it, it warps. It’s all twisted; you can’t split it, you can’t nail anything. We got a bulldozer, burned a lot of the big stumps, got a breaking plow in.

“But it was marshland. You could never get in there ’til July.

“He was a smart guy, he knew all that. He made his point. When spring came, I said, ‘Would you help me if I went back to school?’

“He said, ‘Oh, yeah,’ and that’s all that was ever said.

“That 40 has grown up again. Whenever I drive by there I think about my dad. He was a good man but hard. It was all about work. Sunday was just another day.

“One morning, when I was 19 or 20, after I had been out late the night before, I went out and milked. I knew we had to combine that day so I greased the machine. But it was too wet; so I went back to bed.

“He didn’t know I had been out there and did all that stuff. You’re talking about two really bull-headed, stubborn people with bad tempers.

“He came up and he said some things he shouldn’t have. One of them was about my wife.

“We both lost our temper and got into a fight. I was a college wrestler and I hurt him; he went off up in the woods somewhere.

“My mom and I were really close. I cried to her, but I never got around to telling him I was sorry, and I suppose he would have wanted to tell me he was sorry.

“Joyce and I married on Jan. 4, 1964, right in the middle of wrestling season. Then that day in March, we were supposed to be with my mom and dad. On Sundays, we cut logs; I was always finding ways to make my way through school.

“We got this call from Chippewa Falls on March 4, 1964. They’d slid into a train. They were both killed.

“I can recall yet being on my hands

and knees in front of two caskets there in that little Methodist church, hoping he could hear me tell him I was sorry.

“After that, nobody was living at home on the farm. I was the youngest one; the other kids had all left. Joyce and I moved back out and I basically quit school. It was right during the NFO strike. It was a traumatic thing.

“My wrestling coach, Max Sparger, came out one day to this little farm up in the hills and he said, ‘God gave you a gift, don’t throw it away.’

“I remember saying, ‘Mr. Sparger, I’m so far behind in school.’

“And he said, ‘I’ll talk to your teachers. We’ll get it straightened out.’

“It was the only reason I ever went back.

“So we were milking in the morning, going to school. Putting in crops that spring was crazy. Then Scott was born in May. I grew up real fast.

“Aren’t too many days when something doesn’t cause me to think back to what happened. I made a few promises to myself.

“One was that I was never going to do anything again unless I thought it out pretty carefully. I wasn’t going to let that temper hurt me or other people again.”

02-06-06

Red Raiders

There is a nation deeply rooted in pride and passion, found only in the shared memories of those who have rejoiced there. Not a place you can find with a compass or on a map, it is everywhere.

It is the Red Raider Nation.

It is Uniontown, Pa., which shares a clannish nomenclature almost identical to that of our own Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln High School. According to a Uniontown Web site, its high school teams were awarded the label “Red Raiders” by a sports writer during the 1938 football season, “for uncertain reasons, without fanfare and without official acknowledgment.”

Almost exactly the same process took place here.

The first reference by that name may have been an ad in the *Daily Tribune* for the 1927 silent cowboys-and-Indians movie, “The Red Raiders,” at the Palace theater.

A second date of significance was 1932. That year, Carl Klandrud graduated from River Falls Teachers’ College and came to coach Lincoln High School football.

Also in 1932, Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y., achieved renown for being undefeated, untied, and unscored-upon. The “Maroons” also received bright new uniforms that inspired a journalist to dub the team, “The Red Raiders of the Chenango Valley.” The name first was applied to the football team but became the official nickname for all sports

there. The school colors: crimson and white.

Another parallel to the LHS experience.

No use of the term Red Raiders was found in the *Tribune* until 1938. On Sept. 22, in a game against the Antigo “Ants,” emerged historic terminology for “the Red and White offense”: “The Red Raiders will face one of the heaviest teams....”

Seemingly in competition with “Red and Whites,” the “Red Raiders” handle continued to be used for the football team, presumably because of the red color used for uniforms and the pleasing repetition of the “r” sound. “The Red Raiders displayed a stubborn defense throughout the entire first half, permitting the Ants to score only with several minutes remaining.”

In October, the venerable terms “Lincolnites” and “Red and White gridders” were still used. But the sports writer seemed to want the third option. “The Red Raiders jumped into the driver’s seat,” said the *Tribune*, also noting “the Red Raiders in action” and the “luckless Red Raiders.”

As basketball season replaced football, the Red Raiders tag faded from view. In December, “we were more surprised than the Hodags to see the Red and Whites dumping the ball through the hoop.” Also used were “Red and White quintet,” “Lincolnites” and “Rapids Basketeers.”

The same cycle appears in the Lincoln yearbook, “Ahdawagam.” There is no reference for 1937 but the 1938-

39 volume states, “You can be down but never out! That was the spirit of the 1938 Red Raiders.”

The term applied only to the football team, which was also called the “Red and White Raiders.”

The many parallels include Port Jervis, N.Y., whose red and black team had been called “Red Raiders” early in the 1940s. By 1946, an Indian appeared on the yearbook cover and by 1953, pictures of white students and administrators posing as Indians throughout. Although criticism of like names has been intense throughout in upstate New York, it persists.

A decade ago, almost 60 Wisconsin public high schools were using American Indian icons. Now, most have modified those nicknames or logos.

All the Wisconsin “Red Raiders” have, as has Colgate University, changed either their name or logo or both. That includes Bruce, La Crosse Central, Marathon, Medford, Wauwatosa East and Wisconsin Rapids, which replaced an Indian head with the letters “WR.”

My favorite mascot moniker is Rhinelander’s Hodag: irresistible, appropriate, clever, whimsical, unique. But even this hoary habitué of hemlock has been known to fall victim to its rivals, among them the notorious Sidehill Gougers, Jackalopes and Red-bellied Timber Snipes.

02-13-06

Holland Road

Like many immigrants, Leon Peters' grandparents had a big family. Eighteen offspring? As he said, "There were nine boys and each had a sister." A little Dutch humor. It was same sister all around; her name was Minnie.

"My grandpa came from Holland," said Peters, 83 [2006], Rudolph, "because at Green Bay they knew the Hollanders were good at making canals and they wanted a canal built. Father Van den Broeck went over and solicited the Hollanders to come here."

For their part, the Dutchmen wanted land, which they found at Little Chute, Wrightstown, Hollandtown, Dundas, and Kaukauna, Wis., whose wrestling team here last week sported such names as VanSchyndel, VandeLoo and Vanevenhoven.

"The story they told me," Peters said, "was about where the ship hit an iceberg and was leaking so bad the passengers had to run a bilge pump around the clock. But Arnold Verstegen wouldn't pump because he said, 'I paid my fare.'"

When the travelers disembarked at Green Bay, no one was left to man the bilges and the ship sunk at the dock. Or so the story goes.

"My grandpa at that time was around 21 years of age," said Peters. "His name was Peter Peters."

A colony from southern Holland had been established in the neighborhood of the St. Francis Seraph Catholic church in the settlement of Franciscus Bosch,

renamed Hollandtown. Peter Peters met one of the Van de Loop boys at the local sawmill and was invited home, "which is where he met the sister (Maria-Anna Van de Loop) and times went by and my grandpa married her."

Several of Peter Peters' sons bought homestead land on the Niobrara river in Nebraska. Leon's uncle Arnold, the fourth son, whose own uncle, Gerardus Van de Loop had already settled there, wrote back from Hay Springs, Neb., to the rest, "There's no stumps. Why don't you come out here?"

In 1893, Arnold was joined by John, William and George, and later by brother Martin's widow and a sister, Wilhelmina Heiting, and family.

After Leon's brother, Anthony, and sister, Minerva, were born, their father, Joseph Peters, opted to join his brothers in Nebraska but found no land left for homesteading and got a job hauling mail. The Peters had two more children in Nebraska. "Then my mother said there was no Catholic school so we gotta go back."

The Joseph Peters family (Leon not yet born) soon followed two other brothers, Albert and Henry, to the appropriately-termed Holland Road, now 5th Avenue, town of Rudolph. Albert found a temporary home for Joe's family in the company store and blacksmith shop of the Clark & Scott sawmill prior to Joe buying the actual sawmill property across the road.

"He sold the company store to Bill Dorshorst who come from Nebraska," said Leon. "There was Bill Dorshorst,

Joe, John – all brothers. They settled in a row on Holland Road."

Leon was born on the sawmill, or west, side of the road. Also on Holland Road was the site of the original Rudolph area Catholic church and school. "Across the road, I can remember a stone building with the roof gone, where they had put their horses when they came to school."

The old church was replaced by a school building in the village of Rudolph, to which traveled the Hollanders. Religious services were held in the basement.

The main floor held quarters for the priest, Rev. Philip J. Wagner, and three classrooms. The south half of the second floor was inhabited by nuns on one end and boarders on the other. "Father used to go out and pick up students and they'd stay all week," said Peters.

Wagner was popular with the younger set, having built a "big slide" that, Peters recalled "came out" on Main Street. "In the winter months, he'd also take a toboggan behind his car, let the kids get on there, drive around the country and give them rides."

"During noon hours, we'd go out and wash rocks at the Grotto; he'd give us a stick of gum or a penny."

The famous Rudolph church picnics, as Peters recalled, had their beginnings outside at the northwest corner of the school. "They had a big furnace, on top of it a big kettle. That's where they put the chickens and the vegetables. That's where they had their chowder."

02-20-06

Brig Bombers

Fifty years ago, they were the best of the best: the Brig Bombers, termed by the *Tribune* of Nov. 25, 1955, the first semi-pro basketball team in this city “for years.” Organized in 1955, they were named after the Brig restaurant and bar in the Hotel Dixon, which also sponsored a softball team of the same name.

At the Assumption high school gym the Bombers soundly defeated another similar team, Hewitt Machines of Neenah-Menasha. Hewitt was led by Charlie Block, whose 1947 play for Menasha high school knocked the favored Wisconsin Rapids out of the state tournament.

The Bombers featured “a pretty fair lineup,” including the University of Wisconsin’s two all-time high scorers at that time, Don Rehfeldt and Dick Cable. “Rehfeldt set most of the records before he graduated in 1950 and Cable broke most of them in winding up his Badger career last season,” said the *Tribune*.

Rehfeldt, 6’ 7”, a Chicago native, had been drafted in 1950 by the professional Baltimore Bullets. He came to Wisconsin Rapids to work for Gross Bros. trucking company.

Cable, 6’ 2”, played for Stevens Point high school, 1948-51. He returned to Stevens Point and became an insurance agent.

Also playing for the Brig were Mike Daly of Rapids Lincoln high school and UW-Madison; Boola Gill, of 1951 state champion Lincoln and Marquette

U.; Wayne Oestreich, a recent Lincoln player; Dick Tuszka of Stevens Point; and Cary Bachman, Nekoosa coach.

After the Bombers defeated a team of Stevens Point State College players, the *Tribune* in January 1956 said they overcame 30 personal fouls to beat the Stratford Merchants 104-80, in an “exceedingly rough game played on the small Stratford floor.”

When the 8-0 Bombers “just about ran out of competition in the state” they scheduled a January 1956 game against the professional All-American Indians who claimed to have been defeated only twice in 512 contests. “The Indians entertained the crowd ... but so did the Bombers with some of the sharpest passing and best shooting the nets at the gymnasium have ever seen. And when the final horn blew, it was evident the Bombers will have to go even further if they are going to find some competition that can give them a serious battle.”

“Dick Cable, after he got the range, put on a terrific scoring show that saw him rim the nets with 37 points. Mike Daly and Boola Gill contributed some almost uncanny passing, big Don Rehfeldt swept the boards and Wayne Oestreich flipped in several of his long jump shot specialties.”

The competition the Bombers needed was found at the highest level when Brig owner, William “Spider” Boehme called the Minneapolis Lakers.

The Lakers, a leading NBA team, employed many of professional basketball’s brightest stars, according to a February 1956 *Tribune*. Led by “Mr. Basketball,”

George Mikan, some of the other Lakers were Vern Mikkelsen, Clyde Lovellette, Slater Martin, Whitey Skoog, Chick Mencil and Dick Garmaker. “We took a chance,” said Richard Boehme, 350 12th Ave. S., then the 21-year-old son of the Brig owner.

“We had to offer them a guarantee and pay the school for the gym. They thought they were coming up to play a bunch of hicks.”

The Bombers added 6-9 Paul Morrow and Jim Ritchay, who would assist Daly and Gill at guard.

If the Lakers took the Bombers lightly, said the *Tribune*, they soon changed their mind.

Fantastic outside shooting by Gill, Ritchay and Oestreich brought back memories of the great Red Raider teams of recent years and unexpectedly good rebounding kept the Bombers in the game all the way. The local team led for much of the game and the 80-70 final score in favor of the Lakers, represented the largest margin of the night after the first quarter.

Dick Garmaker, former University of Minnesota ace, was the top Lakers scorer with 23 points. Cable led the Bombers with 18 points.

After the game, the Lakers stopped in at the Brig to pick up lunch, have a drink and hit the highway back to the Minnesota metropolis. Several in a crowd of local loyalists got bombed again at the Brig, savoring the moment when they almost beat the biggest of the big guys.

02-27-06

Riot

Barry Jens, 1131 Weeping Willow Dr., remembers everything about Friday, Feb. 24, 1956, except who won the Rapids-Point game.

It happened the night after the Thursday when the Brig Bombers played the Minneapolis Lakers, an event Barry enjoyed immensely. What came next evokes mixed emotions.

All week, rumors circulated that a “rumble” would take place after the high school basketball game against arch-rival Stevens Point at the Lincoln fieldhouse. “Blackboard Jungle”-styled gangs such as the “Hipsters” were going to converge on River City looking for trouble.

It was an East Side story on Friday night, as Barry found himself in the teen hangout, the Davis restaurant, now Hollyrock’s tavern, which soon was swamped with high school kids fresh from the game, many in red-and-white LHS letter jackets. As Barry peered through a frosty window for a glimpse of any action outside, a burly police officer burst into the room, ordering, “All right, everybody OUT.”

The cop grabbed Barry and sent him to the door. As the abashed young man exited, he saw a fire hose pointed at him and “water all over the place.”

Barry fled around the Oak Street corner and looked back to see a lot more kids following. It was 11 p.m. on a cold winter night so Barry did the only thing he could think of; he ran all the way home.

Helen Morland (now Zimmerman), 2030 3rd St. S., like Barry, was a member of the LHS class of 1958. She didn’t get off so easy.

Helen had heard rumors of the promised rumble too, and, like many classmates, “wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

She saw the fire truck go by and she saw Rapids police chief Rudy Exner exhorting the assemblage from the fire truck, but she was pretty sure nothing much was really going to happen. No way they would hose a bunch of high schoolers.

According to the *Tribune*, the action occurred in the 100 block of 2nd St. N. where some 350 teenagers milled about, mostly curiosity seekers like Barry and Helen.

Expecting trouble, all police officers on the force had been called out by Exner, who also enlisted the help of Fire Chief Cloyd Vallin. A fire engine was driven past the crowd twice.

On the third run, Exner, amid cries of “speech, speech” from the mob, used a public address system based in one of the patrol cars. “Boys and girls, you’ve had your fun and now the fun is over. I’ll give you five minutes to disperse or you’ll get a cold bath.”

When the youths refused to leave, firemen went into action with a sudden burst that sent the crowd running in all directions to escape the chilly spray. The spray scored a direct hit on Helen Morland and swept across the other kids standing outside the restaurant. Her winter coat, Helen said, hung in the basement all week, drying.

According to Exner, there had been no violence during the evening. One 17 year-old youth who failed to follow a police officer’s instructions after several warnings, was locked up for a few hours at the city jail to “think things over.” Two other boys were ordered to report to police headquarters, where they were given a stern lecture and released.

A couple weeks later, a 16-year-old under suspicion took a lie detector test and displayed no knowledge of the gang organizations. “The kids were just trying to act smart,” he said. Some had written “Hipster” on the backs of their jackets to attract attention.

“Citizens of this community,” editorialized the Feb. 28, 1956, *Tribune*, “must have felt greatly relieved by the efficiency and dispatch with which police handled the situation.”

“Those teen-agers (leather-jacketed ‘hipsters’ and ‘Road Kings’ from Wausau, Stevens Point, Plover, or wherever) who congregated here with the idea of creating a disturbance deserved exactly the reception that they got.

“Indeed, they were fortunate the police were there to avert trouble, else the aftermath could have been a considerably more rueful one for them. As the authorities see it, the gang members are a group of abnormal youngsters attempting to swell their egos by attracting attention to themselves by their unusual attire and unsocial conduct.”

03-06-06

Courting Wipperman

What is the matter with Centralia and Grand Rapids? “Bad luck,” according to some. But it was hard to tell if the newspaper was bragging or complaining.

Centralia Enterprise & Tribune, Feb. 24, 1891: “Ice, water and fire have destroyed a lot of property but still the twin cities prosper, and there is every reason to expect a boom in spring with all the improvements made lately.”

For instance, the Port Edwards, Centralia & Northern Railway, connecting with Marshfield. “It opens up the best timbered and tillable sections of the county.”

And the Centralia Pulp and Waterpower Co., about ready to place machinery in its mill, making it “one of the largest and best-fitted paper mills” west of the Allegheny mountains.

“And now comes Mr. Chas. Wippermann, of Chilton, and together with Grand Rapids capitalists, determines to put an extensive furniture factory in Grand Rapids, called Grand Rapids Furniture Co., work to begin soon. These new industries are now assured, and along with them and as evidence that our superior shipping facilities are becoming known abroad, come several parties to look for sites for potato and other produce store-houses.

“Our water powers also become known abroad. Pietch and Richmond of Appleton have been looking for a paper mill site, as was R. Spencer of Lowell, Mass.”

The process of enticing what we like to call “entrepreneurs” had begun in earnest a couple of years earlier. In March 1890, a meeting of Grand Rapids bigwigs convened to consider throwing some cash toward a furniture factory, a natural fit where good times are carved in wood.

Many of the investors’ names have been immortalized in these pages and elsewhere, such as Thomas E. Nash of Centralia, who said he had come prepared to buy stock in a new enterprise. On motion of Geo. L. Williams, E.B. Brundage was elected secretary. On motion of F.J. Wood, George R. Gardner was elected chairman and immediately estimated \$50,000 would be needed “to secure salutary results.”

J.D. Witter thought \$50,000 entirely inadequate and said \$100,000 would be a more likely figure. He recommended a “bonus” of \$10,000.

Wood offered to donate land in the vicinity of the Green Bay depot on north First Street for a building site.

In September 1890, a meeting was again held to figure ways to raise a \$15,000 “bonus” to induce Chicago parties to establish a furniture factory here. “The meeting was about as effective in accomplishing results as is depicted in the tale of the king of France, who, with 20 thousand men marched up the hill and then marched down again,” critiqued the newspaper. “There was a heap of talk, a considerable display of wit, and a final adjournment without being one whit nearer the desideratum than when the meeting opened.”

Success came in February 1891, after six weeks of meetings with Charles and Herman Wipperman. Charles owned a “small factory” at Chilton “but he desired to avail himself of the many advantages in the line of hardwood manufacturing which our sister city (Grand Rapids) was able and willing to offer. Among those advantages might be mentioned large capital, contiguity to timber and unexcelled railroad facilities.”

Of the total capital stock of \$20,000, Wipperman subscribed to \$10,000. The remainder was financed “by people of such financial stability as F.J. Wood, S.A. Spafford, Geo. N. Wood, G.S. Biron, Jas. Canning, Geo. R. Gardner, Daly & Sampson, Elizabeth Rablin, Geo. L. Williams, C.E. Pariseau, F. Pomainville, J.D. Witter, Jacob Lutz & Bro., Chas Briere, Mrs. J. Hamm, Ed. Wheelan and John Farrish.”

The concern might have been “fairly successful,” according to Rapids historian Tom Taylor, but Chas. Wipperman, as an executive, made a good cabinet maker.

“Wipperman’s” was taken over by the Kaudy Manufacturing Co. (incorp. 1906), makers of bar and office furniture and fixtures, which closed during Prohibition. The buildings were idle until the advent of Prentiss-Wabers Stove Company. Then came the Latin Company, makers of “Parkway” clothes for men, followed by “S&S” clothing company, which owned the 42-year-old facility when it burned in the spring of 1934.

03-13-06

Martha Klappa

On a bright spring morning recently, local historical activist Phil Brown emerged from his Den of Antiquity long enough to realize he had misplaced his sunglasses. Before he scurried back into the Den, Phil described why he has been underground. He is busy assembling a display that will profile the old East Side downtown for the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum.

Perspicacious sexagenarians know I began my misadventures in River City by taking a figurative walk through the old East Side. My charming escort, a nonagenarian herself, Vi Palmer, took me through the mysterious town in which she had lived and worked as a young clerk. I hadn't seen some of the buildings she frequented nor met the personalities she spoke so highly of.

Now, another generation has passed and I took a similar imaginary hike with another woman of the East Side; but this time, it was a place I remember.

Martha Klappa was the long-time owner of Neises' shoe store, only a few blocks upstream from her present home at 521 2nd Street S.

Born Jan. 7, 1913, near Milladore, to Rosalia and Louis Linzmaier, Martha is 93 and remarks, with humor, "Isn't that awful?"

She attended St. Killian's Catholic school in Blenker and was married to Edward Neises at St. Killian's in 1934. For about a year and a half, Arnold and Martha operated a shoe repair shop in

Nekoosa, before moving to "where Paul Gross is now." Finding Oak Street "a bit out of the way for traffic," the Neises moved into a former barber shop on Second Street South across from the Wood County National Bank. The store space was rented from Rose Mazur, formerly of Chicago.

At the time, Gleue's shoe store was on the riverside corner of Grand and Second, Martha said. A few steps upstream was the Sugar Bowl restaurant, owned by Tom Poulos, assisted by Jimmy Drivas, cook. Jimmy made the candy on display in the cabinet near the door, said Martha. It was expensive but good, "like they make in Germany."

Then came her own store, Gamble's hardware and Penney's (which also sold shoes) and the Daly drug store. "There used to be a little radio shop next to the Gamble store. When he went out, there was a bakery in there for a while. The company we bought shoes from decided to tear that wall out and make our store bigger. After a while, that got too small. We built on clear to the river in the back. It got to be pretty good-sized."

Across Second Street, returning from Brauer's clothing store on the Oak Street corner, were the Coast to Coast hardware and a grocery store that became Schroeder's variety store and last, the bank.

With apartments and offices above many of the businesses, there were a lot of folks coming and going. "Friday night downtown was hilarious, the big night. It was the night to go out. I guess the taverns were all busy on a Friday

night, you know how that goes.

"We stayed open until nine on Fridays. There was a time they said we should stay open on a Thursday night too but that didn't work out.

"During World War II, everything was rationed. There was hardly enough fuel to run the place and keep it warm. Every shoe had to have a ration ticket."

Having been gone a year and a half, Arnold Neises was killed at Leyte in the Philippines. Martha needed part-time help but kept working the store. "You had to go forward. You had to make a living."

In 1949, Martha married Edward Klappa, a fellow parishioner at S.S. Peter & Paul. Edward brought two daughters to the marriage; a son, Gale, was born in 1950.

Martha said she had surgery in 1955 but "I never took a vacation in the forty years. I worked every day Monday through Saturday. Nobody stayed open on a Sunday. That just wasn't the thing to do.

"Those were good years. Little by little, things just didn't work out. I think they thought the buildings weren't that good any more. They wanted us to go in the mall but we were almost of retiring age.

"It's too bad they tore it down. It was a good business block. My store was right across from the bank. Veterans Park, that's where we all were."

03-20-06

Bye Bye Bee Bee

Bee Bee's *Daily Tribune* column gave you a pretty good scoop on "What's Buzzin'" here. The following are from late 1955 as BB told it.

- The kindergarten class at Congregational Sunday School got off to a smiling start. Seems Mrs. Cliff Winter had gone over some songs the children enjoyed and asked if any of them had a special song they'd like the group to sing. Several suggestions were made but they were drowned out by Bill Handy's request—"Davy Crockett."

- About 19 ½ years previous to 1955, the *Tribune* carried a picture of a tiny baby propped up in a chair, garbed in a diaper and an officer's cap, and holding a holster on his lap: entitled "Future Cop!" Little did the newsman realize that this week, that baby—Bob Exner, now 20 years old—started his "on-the-job training" with the FBI.

- In the middle of the bridge was a stubborn auto ... blocking traffic. Not much we could do but give the gent a push as traffic was jammed up coming towards us and we had started a pretty good line of cars behind. So push we (the 1950 model blue hornet) did. As the car ahead cleared the bridge, the door swung open and Capt. Frank Exner gave us a nod of appreciation. "Shucks, Frank, it was nothin'. We know how hard it is to read the 'gas' indicator so early in the morning."

- Charles Spees doesn't think much of television shows and pranks built around them. Charles retired early Sat-

urday night so he'd be in good shape for hunting the next morning. He was awakened by the phone, which his wife answered. A very formal voice asked for Mr. Charles Spees and asked, "Can you answer the \$64,000 question?" Before Charley could say a word the receiver clicked. Understand Teacher Spees was conducting quite an investigation in classes Monday.

- A.A. Ritchay missed his first football game at Lincoln High School in 36 years when he didn't get to see the Point-Rapids game.

It is hard for us to believe John would schedule a wedding the morning after a Point game but he did and so A.A., being all involved in wedding parties and the like, just couldn't stick around for even a quarter.

- Jimmy Natwick will be more careful the next time he makes a necklace for Cub Scouting. You see, Jimmy had a colorful Indian necklace all ready for a den meeting but put it within reach of the dog. Because it was made out of a breakfast cereal and quite inviting, the dog ate it. Jimmy went back to work on a new one and issued a warning to the canine to keep away from his projects.

- Robert Goetszke, Lincoln High School instructor, to a cut-up in one of his classes: "You're quite a card; you should be on the stage."

Student: "Gee, Mr. Goetszke, do you really think so?"

Goetszke: "Yes, I do—and the stage leaves in 10 minutes."

- Mrs. Clarence Plahmer got in a conversation with her 6-year-old niece,

Charmaine Ristow, the other day, and found out a few things about "love" in the modern generation.

Charmaine was asked about her boy friend and she explained his name was Gerry Gruber, 8.

"How do you know he's your boy friend, did he tell you?" queried her aunt. "Oh no, he didn't tell me. I can tell by the way I look at him that he likes me," was Charmaine's answer.

- Mrs. John (Catherine) Krause was doing a bit of routine grocery shopping recently and all went well until she opened her purse to pay for the merchandise. Mrs. K. let out a stifled shriek and her face turned a rosy red as she (and several people nearby) observed a long, old, dried-up corn cob in her purse.

Without stopping to explain, Mrs. K. paid her bill and rushed out of the store before anyone was able to recognize her (she hopes). A steno at City Hall, Catherine knew that she was not in the habit of carrying old corn cobs in her purse.

Consequently, the finger of suspicion pointed to Bob Tain, assistant city engineer, a very likely suspect...

But, with a few last sibilants, the buzz went silent. Bee Bee was about to fly the hive, having relinquished his duties to new managing editor, Oliver D. Williams.

William R. Beckmann, a member of the staff since 1946, like many journalists before and after, had upped his pollen quotient at a public relations department, that of Evinrude Motors, Milwaukee.

03-27-06

Trust Nothing*(but River City Memoirs)*

What can we depend on any more?" That is the topic of a big community vision thing down at the Witter Hotel. Of course, local dignitaries want to give it a good spin.

To the congregated multitudes, company president G.W. Mead "the first" says we can depend on his Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. "as long as there is a rapids in the hardest working river in the cosmos."

L.M. Alexander, Mead's counterpart at Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co., agrees that, as long as mill owners stroll from their mansions along the river, we can rely on local enterprises.

Furthermore, a union official admits that it might not be glamorous, but he knows one job he, his family and his descendants, can depend on, is papermaking.

Neighbors raise their noses in accord. As long as world headquarters for that familiar sulfur smell are in Wisconsin Rapids and Port Edwards, so Major Mulzer at Tri-City Airport vows, there will be a plane to Chicago.

You can depend on Consolidated and Nepco. That much know the brothers Gross and Clark at their trucking companies—in it for the long haul.

Even if your employer by name happens to be the "Consoweld" laminated countertop company or "Ahdawagam" paperboard manufacturer, good old Consolidated, the real power, can be de-

pended on to keep you employed during down times, like they did during the Depression.

Even if you can't get in at Consolidated, one place you can depend on is Preway. It's piece work but if you work hard enough, you make just as much.

If you can't get a job at Preway, you can depend on other local companies, like American Carbonic, the refrigerated-air company, or Harvard clothing.

Like Eatmor Products Co. and Indian Trail cranberries. As long as there is Thanksgiving, there will be a market for Cranmoor's most important fresh fruit.

You can depend on companies like Grand Rapids Milling Co. and Grand Rapids Creamery Co. As long as there are housewives baking bread, there will be milkmen coming up the walk.

You can depend on sawmills that line the river from Nekoosa to Biron. And wood products factories like Grand Rapids Combination Wagon Co., Grand Rapids Sash & Door Co., and Oberbeck furniture. There are more trees in Wood County than you can cut in a hundred lifetimes.

Grand Rapids Brewery? In Wisconsin, you can depend on Krauts to drink beer. The rock-solid brick building will stand for centuries.

Grand Rapids Cigar Co. A good smoke is one thing a man can always enjoy.

Anyone can see there is a lot more in River City to depend on. Like a public transportation system that includes city buses and streetcars. No way the old lady's got to hike a muddy street to Johnson Hill's for a new girdle.

Full-service gas stations along 8th Street and Grand Avenue. Fill 'er up. And the groceries on uncountable corners. Ketchum's coal and Daly's ice. Wood County teachers college. More prospective pupils born every year and more demand for pedagogues. Saint Peter & Paul school. No problem staffing Catholic classrooms. Nuns: one thing you can depend on.

Lone Birch, Lone Maple, Lone Pine, Lone Elm, Lone Spruce, Lone Oak, Lone Popple and Lone Lilac schools. As long as folks eat, there will be farm kids and little schools by trees.

There has always been a lot to depend on. Just ask Bob Wakely at Point Basse where you can always depend on a tankard of Goodhue's Finest. Wakely's pal, Amable Grignon, knows there will always be a demand for the gentleman's beaver headwear he specializes in.

Grignon's sometimes neighbor, Chief Oshkosh, will enjoy his land as long as the sky is blue, the ink is black and the President, an honorable man.

As Oshkosh's predecessor, the mound builder, surveys his monumental work, he knows one thing you can depend on is that no one will ever disturb something a guy went to so much trouble to pile up. It might be early April in places with calendars but that doesn't make the mound builder anybody's fool. That's one thing, he knows, you can depend on.

That, and a good hot meal of woolly mammoth with a little trilobite on the side.

04-04-06

Bancroft Tornado

About 1:30 p.m., April 3, 1956, town of Pine Grove chairman Vilas Waterman, stood by the Bancroft, Wis., bank as a familiar scene was transformed. "It was real foggy. Suddenly the fog lifted and I looked over a couple of blocks and saw this house just collapse."

As Waterman rushed from the bank, the force of the gale blew him across the street. A thunderous tornado had struck the normally peaceful village.

Pitching in with other townspeople to help those in immediate need, Waterman used his station wagon as an ambulance and transported Nick Lorbecki, 77, to St Michael's hospital at Stevens Point. The home of Nick and his wife, Susan, 80, had caved in from the force of the winds. Susan lay beneath the ruins, one of two who lost their life that day.

Also killed was Gilbert Hofschild, 55, Wisconsin Rapids, crushed while working on a nearby house with his wife, Mamie, 56, also injured. "Just 200 yards to the side and it would have taken our schoolhouse filled with kids," Waterman told reporters. His own home suffered severe damage to the roof and a storage building was demolished.

Wood County Sheriff Arthur E. Berg reported that the entire southeast quarter of Bancroft was wrecked by violent winds. Trees had blown across roads, tying up traffic and telephone lines to the area were out of commission. Hours after the deadly swath, people stood in small

groups or wandered aimlessly down the highway, reported the *Tribune*.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Kramer, directly east of the house Hofschild was working in, weathered the blast but chairs and tables were overturned, windows shattered, curtains torn to shreds and bits of furniture strewn throughout the structure and outside. "I was standing on the back porch waiting for the thunder and lightning to calm down," said Mrs. Kramer. "It was dark and foggy. Suddenly the porch door and windows burst open and everything seemed to take off. The next thing I remembered was that it got real light outside and when I glanced out back I saw that our garage was gone."

Waterman said it would be quite a while before "we get this mess straightened out."

Red Cross and Salvation Army officials came forward with offers of help but left when Waterman told them he thought the local folks could get along all right by themselves.

It didn't seem like it that day but Bancroft was only a part of a major weather event. Within an hour, another tornado hit Berlin, Wis., leaving seven dead and 50 injured. "I felt a sudden pressure in my ears and before I knew it, cement blocks, machines, and people were floating around on the ceiling," remembered John Sands, Berlin, president of Sands Knitting Mills.

The storm came within a few yards of the high school, where 400 students watched the tornado churn toward them,

carrying cars and buildings through the air.

In Berlin, Mrs. Neil Zamzow saw a funnel-shaped object heading towards her house and ran outside to grab her four year old daughter who was playing in the yard. As Mrs. Zamzow turned back toward the house, she watched the tornado strike the main building of the local Carnation plant. Mrs. Zamzow ran to her basement, shoved her daughter between a large freezer and several bags of cement, and laid on top of her.

She heard a loud crash and looked up in time to see the framework of her house uprooted from the foundation and carried away. Then all she saw was daylight; the house had been flattened to kindling.

The storm crossed Lake Michigan and began producing tornados from Saugatuck to Traverse City and inland, killing 17 more and obliterating dozens of houses.

When conditions had quieted here, my family joined the procession of sightseers to what locals still call "Bang-croft." For a youngster, it was something to brag about. Looking at a wrecked house at which someone had been killed.

04-10-06

Trouble

Well, ya got trouble, my friend. Right here in River City. Tonight, at McMillan Memorial Library, 7 p.m., presented by the Friends of Marian the Librarian: River City Memoirs author, municipal historian, poet, sage, philosopher, skeptic, cynic, knocker, crab apple, cat kicker, chronic bitcher, chipmunk butcher, misanthrope...

After 26 years [2006], though I can't find my eyeglasses, remote control or the phone number of Mayor Kubisiak, I still remember how "River City Memoirs" come into being.

In 1981, when *Tribune* editor Tom Enwright asked me to find a name my serial ruminations, I had never heard "Whisky Rapids" referred to as River City. The idea came to me by way of Meredith Willson's 1957 Broadway musical, "The Music Man," also a 1962 and 2003 motion picture.

Willson's rousing tribute to brass is based on impressions of his birthplace, Mason City, Iowa, and represents similar provincial mediapoli such as our own. Yes, there are "River Cities" from La Crosse to Watertown and Lawrence to Louisville. Edmonton, Alberta, is "River City" and, in Scotland, a soap opera takes the name.

So "River City" was chosen for its universal qualities and for the deviltry of some lyrics in the musical. Why "memoirs"?

Because memoirs are somewhere between a history and a diary, more ex-

pressive than the former and less personal than the latter. Please do not call it River City "Memories."

First, it's medicinal wine from a teaspoon, then Bud Light from a brown bottle and next, your son is playin' for money in a hip-hop sweatsuit and listenin' to some out-o'-town jasper push horse race gamblin', not a wholesome trottin' race, no, but where they set down right on the horse.

An early adaptation here was "River City Band" in the early 1980s. Vocalist "Duke" Ross told me the moniker had to be ditched because another group from Wisconsin Dells had already taken it.

Years ago, I began a file, "Things Called River City." Here, can be found River City Mall, Home School Assoc., YMCA Ski Club, Shootout Girls Basketball Tournament.

"River Cities": Re-Leaf Program, Essay Contest, Fun Fest Pancake Brunch, Investment Center, Country Jam, Festival of Lights House Decorating Contest, Business Expo '93.

In 1985, came the first use of "River City" to appear in a local phone book or city directory: "River City Shopper."

All week long, your River City youth'll be fritterin' away their noontime, supertime, choretime, too. The kids in the knickerbockers, shirt-tailed young ones peekin' in the pool hall window after school.

The second known entry came in 1991: River City Construction, followed by, in 1994, River Cities Development Corp., which, named our chamber of commerce. In 1995, River City Investiga-

tions, no address listed. River City Reality. The next year, River Cities Christian Church. River City Salon.

Would you like to know what kind of conversation goes on while your kids are loafin' around the pool hall? They'll be tryin' out Bevo, tryin' out Cubebs, tryin' out tailor-mades like cigarette fiends and braggin' all about how they're gonna cover up a tell-tale breath with Sen-Sen.

In 1997, came River Cities Bank, River City Insurance Center and River City Process Servers. In 1999, River City Cab. 2001, River Cities Spas, River City Automotive, River City Motors, River City Rentals, River City Tap.

Now one fine night, they leave the pool hall headin' for the dance at the Armory, libertine men and scarlet women and awful so-called music that'll grab your son, your daughter into the arms of a jungle animal instinct.

River Cities Community Access.

In 2003, River Cities High School.

River Cities Home Inspections.

Mothers of River City, before it's too late, watch for the tell-tale signs of corruption. When your son leaves the house for McMillan library tonight, does he rebuckle his knickerbockers below the knee?

Is there a nicotine stain on his index finger? A Democratic pamphlet hidden in his backpack?

Is he starting to memorize jokes from Cap'n Billy's Whizbang?

Well if so, my friends, ya got trouble. And that's right here, in River City.

04-13-06

Stevens' Point

They were a footloose bunch, these capitalists, who carved their good times in the "pinery." Up the river they went, from Point Basse (Nekoosa) to Frenchtown (Port Edwards); to Grand Rapids (Wisconsin Rapids); to Mill Creek to Plover to "the Point," to Little Bull (Mosinee), Big Bull (Wausau) and Jenny Bull (Merrill).

They and their forebears had already made their way up other rivers, from "ye olde" England to New England, New York state, Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin territory.

The Oct. 11, 1939, *Daily Tribune* remarked that one of our notables, George Stevens, was born in Belmont, N.Y., and that he had been active with the Baptist church of Almond, N.Y.

Like father, like son. Among the first settlers of Allegany County, N.Y., had been the father of "our" George, namely Phineas Stevens, credited with an 1803 arrival at Almond Village, New York.

The pattern becomes familiar. The "pioneer," Stevens Sr., was the first to build a sawmill on Almond's Canacadea Creek. He also opened a tavern "hotel." An account attributed to Portage County Judge George W. Cate said Phineas' son, George Stevens, unloaded his wagon on the river bank at the foot of what is now Main Street, Stevens Point, to be transported by canoe upstream to Big Bull Falls.

Cate said he saw Stevens a few years later and frequently, until Stevens' last visit to the Pinery in 1851 or 1852.

"When last here, he was completely broken down, much bent over, and leaned heavily on a stout cane with both hands in walking."

Cate said that the son of George, Chester D. Stevens, resided at Bull Run Falls a while and probably had been with his father at Stevens Point, but went west to California in search of gold.

Cate also said George Stevens was induced here by Robert Wakely, who had opened a tavern and trading post at "Point Bausses," a mile south of what is now the city of Nekoosa.

Wakely wanted to know where the great river came from and trudged north from Shaw Rapids, now Stevens Point, to Big Bull and Grandfather Bull, where he found the thick, heavy timbered and potentially lucrative country of pine trees along the banks. He was so impressed with the surroundings, he attempted to convince everyone who would listen that this region would be ideal for permanent settlement.

In 1837, eleven years before Wisconsin became a state, Wakely made a trip to St Louis with a lumber shipment from the Whitney mill near what is now downtown Nekoosa. While traveling, he met George Stevens, on a similar mission.

Wakely told his fellow New Yorker about great pine forests and water power. Stevens had his doubts but at the insistence of Wakely, accepted an invitation to accompany the Whitney expedition back to this region.

When Stevens arrived, he found Wakely hadn't exaggerated. Shortly af-

terwards, he went back to Pennsylvania and New York to make arrangements to settle permanently in Wisconsin.

Stevens sold his interests in Big Bull Falls in 1844 to three guys from St Louis for \$5,000 and went back to New York again. He returned to this area in 1851-52 for a short visit.

No one here, at the time of the 1939 story, knew what had become of Stevens. Now, through the Internet, the information is widely available. Through a William Cory family website, it was found that "Lucy Corey" married George A. Stevens, son of Phineas Stevens.

George, born 1790 in New York state, died in 1866 at Rockford, Ill., at the home of his daughter Pamela Loop. She was, like him, a native of Almond, NY. He had lived in Mendota, Ill., and was buried in Belvidere, Ill.

Another source, an 1844 newspaper, printed notice of a Sheriff's Sale in Dane county, Wisconsin Territory, against the "goods, chattels and lands" of George Stevens, county of Portage, Wisconsin Territory "in favor of Christopher Douglass."

Stevens' lots in the county of Portage, which included what is now Wood county, were to be sold at the capitol in Madison. Some call them vicissitudes. They are the ups and downs of the sawdust millionaires of early Wisconsin.

04-24-06

Haunted

Dear Mom,
Seven years. It took me that long after you died to open the plastic bag and unwrap the 36 double-sided pages.

Unlike this, yours is a private message, addressed to Dad, though you must have known I would read it. "Beloved Don..."

Your husband, my father, Donald A. Engel, retired long-time Consolidated employee, Methodist, Boy Scout leader, alderman, Odd Fellow. You were writing to him, probably as therapy, a month after he died in May 1991 at St. Joseph hospice.

"Today again I was reminded of wonderful times when a photo arrived, taken at Japanese Gardens [Florida], that late in life paradise, and I plan to send them the beautiful tribute Dave wrote to you in The Tribune. I miss you so much that I wonder sometimes how to get through another day."

Mom, the years after your four children grew up and before Kathy died were the best for you and Dad. At the end, he was the sickest man I have ever seen walking public thoroughfares.

As you wrote, July 7, 1991, "This morning's devotions in the Upper Room are about Peter washing Jesus' feet. I was so glad to remember that I washed your feet and gave you a 'sponge bath' several times. I realize now how very much spirit you had to face your pain like you did. I'm truly sorry I wasn't more considerate and hope you've for-

given me and that God will, too."

Using only the authority of a son, I forgive and absolve you, Mother; your life was a tribute to my father from the day you met until the bitter end for both of you.

You thanked him for the central air conditioner, for the red Buick he bought for you when he was dying, and "those beautiful, thoughtful cards from you when my mind was confused. "Oh, how I meant to make a chart of all the things you meant to me (I know I did it in the past, but I could have helped you so much by doing it again): I hope you felt it."

Every little thing reminded you of him.

The song that had played at a Menasha bowling alley, "when we were dating and you picked me up."

A walk to Two Mile Creek, "made believe I was walking with you at Silver Lake."

September 13: "I'll never forget the day you gave me my diamond in Terry Andrae Park The glint in your eyes was so special."

As ever, the garden. "That's the closest place I feel to God and you, even tho your touch is missing. I'm trying to do the best with the shrubs you were so proud to plant. There's even a blueberry or two on one.

"Worked in the flowers, which is still the best therapy for me.

"The beautiful maple tree in our front yard reminds me of when we planted it and also the joy you had working in the yard. You left a legacy for our family of

working in the soil."

In that first year of grief, things got sorted out.

August 8. "Dug out your rain jacket (with tears flowing) from your golf cart and will wear it even tho it's painful."

She also dug out stuff for us middle-aged kids to look through. Coats to be cleaned and given away. Shirts to Goodwill and the Family Resource Center. Old checks from the 1970s, burned.

Then came the first Christmas in 52 years – Mom, without your beloved. "My arms just ache to hold you again. I try to feel it in my mind. Went to the cemetery with a dozen red silk roses. Other roses from anniversary were still in vase frozen, so I just laid the red ones in the snow."

It was such a lonesome Christmas night that, "of all things," you got out the vacuum cleaner and went to work. You, "Mom," my mother, Arline "Sally" Engel, who died abruptly in 1999, without time for one last purge of materials like this journal to your husband, wrote: "Today I had a 'haunting' experience. Had bridge here. Then Alice came late, came in the back door without knocking.

"I heard the door 'squeak' and it seemed like old times when you would be coming in.

"Oh, how I would love to have you walk in that door, or any door. I miss you so much."

05-08-06

WCTC 1956

How about the names they come up with now?

The latest is my trash pickup company. "Onyx" will become "Veolia," a big French company named after the wind.

Get it? Garbage, wind. Consultants carve some clever copy.

"Solarus." The new handle for my phone and internet provider. I prefer the tongue-twisting "WCTC," good ol' Wood County Telephone Co. The familiar letters represent the history of one of the last important world headquarters located right here in River City.

Some of my wife's relatives still own a phone company in northeast Wisconsin, so I have a personal appreciation for a company like WCTC that pulled itself up by its own fiber-optic cable.

Founded in 1896 in reaction to the big bully, "Bell," Wood County Telephone Co. was making a major change sixty years later and fifty years ago, and it came, fittingly, in technology.

In 1956, WCTC (not then known by its initials) was preparing to install dial services throughout what was then called the Tri-Cities area. Plans called for new buildings in Wisconsin Rapids and Nekoosa, according to H.B. Flower, company manager.

The site in Rapids would be at 440 E. Grand Ave., across from the almost-new Hotel Mead. Donn Hougen of Rapids had been engaged as architect. (A check of the "telephone book" shows WCTC continues to operate at the same East Grand Avenue address.)

A garage for the company would be located at 10th Avenue and Chase Street.

The \$1 million program would also require construction of underground conduit and cables, and aerial cables, (telephone lines?) throughout the service area.

The company had expanded modestly in the 1930s, with the purchase of the Kellner Exchange and a small exchange on Plover Road, but the worldwide depression slowed communications growth. Although dial equipment had been ordered for Port Edwards in 1941, World War II again halted production of needed materials for civilian use. After the shipment was received in 1945, Port converted early the following year.

In 1953-54, WCTC acquired the Chrystal-Saratoga Telephone Co. which served a large area south and east of Rapids in what has been our fastest-growing area for more than half a century.

Other small companies were absorbed and the company's own rural lines converted to eight-party service so all was ready in 1956 to begin the changeover to dial, which was completed in 1959.

A 1956 *Tribune* Centennial edition enumerated the expansion of telephone use here.

In 1878, four telephones. In 1896, 65 telephones; increasing to 229 in 1900; 2,933 in 1925; 8,175 in 1950; and 9,710 in 1955.

The local phone company's first office was in the Wood Block, a building still at the east end of the Grand Avenue bridge. After 1918, the office moved to a then-new structure fronting on 2nd St. S.

In the olden days, homesters called "central" by turning a small crank which projected from the side of the phone cabinet. Connection was made with an operator seated at a switchboard, sometimes in a residence. The resulting "calls" went out on a "party line," with varying combinations of short and long rings for each household.

There was no hand-cranking here in 1956 but, to make a call, it was necessary to answer the operator's "Number please." Dial would change all that.

Directors re-elected that year were: Earl Bossert, Frank J. Henry, William T. Nobles, Ellsworth Helke and Flower.

"The large-scale modernization program becomes necessary because of the ever-increasing demands for more and better service," Flower explained in what has become a tech mantra.

President Bossert told stockholders that 1955 had been the most successful in the company's history. Good dividends had been paid to the 1,300 stockholders in the Tri-City area. "We have actually reached the end of the rope with our present equipment. Our switchboards, which were more than adequate a few years ago, have been extended and extended to the point where it is impossible to add more to them.

"There is nothing to be gained by discussing our shortcomings at the moment. It is enough to say that we must take every step necessary to make ourselves strong in order to meet the ever-increasing demands of the present and of the future."

05-15-06

SWCHC

Even history has history. For instance, our South Wood County Historical Corp. was founded in 1955 and had its first public meetings fifty years ago.

The formation of a society had been undertaken a few months previous, with T.W. Brazeau serving as chairman of the temporary board.

If you've ever founded something, you know a constitution and by-laws must be conceived, or, more likely, derived from that of a similar group. The SWCHC version was adopted in July 1955 at SWCHS, when "Society" rather than "Corporation," capped the name, at least according to news accounts.

At the constitutional convention were C.A. Jasperson, Port Edwards; Warren E. Beadle, Biron; Mrs. Estella Farrish, T.W. Brazeau and W.J. Taylor, Wisconsin Rapids. Also present was William J. Schreck, Madison, field representative of the State Historical Society, who played a large role in the early days of the local organization and ensured a period of mutual support and recognition.

The mission of the group here was "to preserve, advance and disseminate knowledge of the history of Wood County." Headquarters space was contributed in the Mead-Witter block, managed by Mrs. Farrish and in which a grandson and great-grandson of T.W. Brazeau continue the practice of law.

A December 1955 *Tribune* editorial said that the six-month-old institution filled a long-felt need. "This area is rich

in history, and the story of its growth and development from the frontier days of a century ago should be compiled and preserved in readily accessible form for the benefit of present and future generations.

"To be sure, local history has not been entirely ignored. There have been some praiseworthy compilations, largely the result of individual effort—such as the pictorial history assembled by T.A. Taylor, and the *History of Wood County*, published in 1923 by a Minneapolis concern."

In May 1956, at the multi-purpose room of Howe School, Schreck spoke at the first public meeting of the recently-organized South Wood County Historical Society. The state representative listed fields of endeavor in which the locals might engage, advising that collection and preservation of historical material was most important. Other worthwhile activities might include operating a museum, tape recording old settlers, publishing newspaper articles and radio and TV programs, filming historical movies, marking historical sites, sponsoring pilgrimages to places of interest and developing a speakers panel.

In fact, most of these suggestions were fulfilled in the productive first decade after organization.

At the May 1956 meeting, Mrs. Hazel Gemberling of the Howe School faculty described activities of the school's Junior Historical Society and introduced three pupils who reported on the group: Susan Wefel, Sally Hazell and John Farrish.

Mrs. (Estella) Farrish, secretary-treasurer, announced that 24 persons had taken charter memberships in the senior society through annual dues of \$1 per year. (The dues in 1980 were still \$1.)

In November 1956 at Howe School, Dan McKercher and James Nash, Wisconsin Rapids, and Marshall Buehler, Port Edwards, presented early community history at a meeting of what continued to be referred to as the South Wood County Historical "Society." Buehler showed early pictures of mill development at Port Edwards. Mrs. Farrish showed articles that had been donated to the future museum.

Eight new directors were appointed to the board: Mrs. Hazel Gemberling, Carl Otto, Buehler, Dr. F.X. Pomainville, Martin Lipke, T.A. Pascoe, Mrs. Fern Amundson and Dr. L.C. Pomainville.

From the 1955 *Tribune* editorial:

"History, it should be remembered, is a continuing thing. We are making it today, just as surely as did our forebears when they established the first settlement here some 120 years ago. Thus, the society might well set itself the task of keeping the historical record up to date, with the passing of the years, as well as delving into the bygone eras, for the greater enlightenment of those who shall follow in our footsteps."

05-22-06

Memorial Day 2006

Every day is Memorial Day at River City memoirs. In our world, every year is Memorial Year. Adios to 1945, 1955, 1973, 1976, 1989, and Y2K, when we were told to lie down in the bunker one last time. Rest in peace, *auld lang syne*.

Every month is Memorial May when lilacs in the dooryard bloom and the thrush chirps for the long-lamented lost leader, Lincoln.

Rest in peace all the Mays and all those who have almost succumbed to the near-toxic swoon of the purple plant that often grows on as a memorial to something here and gone. Rest in peace, homesteader.

Every morning is Memorial Morning when the sun also rises, only to set on the far side of noon. Every night is Memorial Night, when stars born in the east are buried in the west. Rest in peace, little sparkles. You guided the sailor on a dark sea.

Here in the Heartland, every day is Memorial Day, but always first for the sacrifices of soldiers. Our own, fallen in Revolution, Civil war, World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq: for the battle dead a 21-word salute. And for the equally dead of other armies, as the good Jesuits say, *requiescant in pace*.

Every day is Memorial Day for the high and mighty: the Washingtons, Roosevelts, Kennedys and the like.

Every day is Memorial Day for a peripatetic bunch we have personally brought to glory but never seen, the

Bakers, Balderstons, Woods, Witters, Witherspoons, Whittleseys, Wippermans, Worthingtons, Wakelys and Warners. Rest in peace, founders. And for the remainder, the Smiths, Johnsons and Joneses. Rest in peace common-called folk as dear as any.

Every day is Memorial Day for the worldly superstars who transcended their simple given names; for example, the musical idols John, George, Robert, Hank, James, Janis, Judy, Elvis. Liberate? As Homer says, *requiescant in pace*.

Every day is Memorial Day for a way of life, the good old Consolidated paradigm of paternalism, prosperity and public service. Out by Rudolph, a solemn St. Philomena requiem for the dairy farms that brought a pleasant, productive and Puritanical order to the landscape. Rest in peace, peace.

Every day is Memorial Day for a place, that community of people and structures in the vicinity of the Grand Avenue bridge. Penney's, Sugar Bowl, Friendly Fountain, Johnson Hill, Quick Lunch, Montgomery Ward. Rest in peace, Rapids downtown. You provided grist for this mill.

Every day is Memorial Day to the old folks who shared the times of their lives in our 26 years of interviews. Sail away, oh ship of the 19th and 20th centuries. Rest in peace, tour guides.

Every day is Memorial Day at the cemeteries: Forest Hill, Calvary and "generic" out on the bumpy four lane at which my very original and extraordinary parents are buried, with space next

door for their eldest. Rest in peace, if you can stand the traffic.

My sister, somewhere else, blowing in the wind. Rest in peace, restless ash. Every day is Memorial Day for you.

Every day is Memorial Day for the Engels at the old Seymour graveyard, now across the valley of death from a golf course. You will never rest in peace there, old farmers, busily fertilizing the dandelions.

A reunion-full of aunts and uncles died these past couple years: Fred, Grace, Wallace, Mildred, Gordon. In honor of them, every day is Memorial Day. Rest in peace, quiet persons now silent.

Every day is Memorial Day for the neighbors of the Clyde Avenue and Two Mile Avenue homes that I still drive by every day or two. Rest in peace, happy breezeway.

Every day is Memorial Day for Bob Des Jarlais, my rambling pal. Rest in peace, Mr. Kahuna, and all the friends we had.

Every day is Memorial Day for our children in memory of what they were. Rest in peace little ones, and please, big girls, don't go before I do.

Every day is Memorial Day for our long lost self, the boy who was witness to what is written in these pages.

For these and other reasons, lay wreaths if you are a wreath-layer and blow taps if you are a bugler. In River City, every man is a music man and every day is Memorial Day.

05-06-06

Conway

Except for Native Americans and an odd French fur trader, everyone who called River City home in 1856 had arrived recently. Many had been citizens of foreign lands.

Among the most numerous were the Irish, including Patrick Conway. His biography in the 1923 "History of Wood County" is reproduced here substantially as originally written.

Like many of Pat Conway's Irish countrymen he found employment in England, where he married Bridget Hinchey. But neither in Ireland nor in England did the couple see any great opportunity. Their thoughts turned accordingly to the United State of America, and for this country they took passage on a sailing vessel which after four weeks landed them at New York.

In that city they made their home for a short time but soon found conditions in such a crowded center of population were too much like those in Europe.

In the vast areas of the then far West and Northwest, as yet wild and but thinly settled, the opportunities for which Mr. Conway sought were awaiting the hardy pioneer and he resolved to embrace them.

In 1851, Pat and his wife drove into what is now Section 9 in the town of Rudolph and began the work of improving 119 acres. A period of years followed, marked by hard and almost incessant labor.

During the pioneer years, the Conways were strengthened by only the plainest

food. Items such as flour had to be carried for miles through the almost trackless forest.

But over the years, Pat bought more land and a substantial home, ran lumber on the Wisconsin river and became a logging contractor. He also tried cattle raising with considerable success.

The family were devoted Catholics who opened their home to missionary priests. As a member of the Rudolph town board, Pat helped develop and establish schools in his region.

Patrick Conway retired in 1898 and moved to Rapids where he died in 1902. His wife, Bridget was still living in 1923 at 89 years of age.

The Conways were blessed with 13 children.

Typical pioneers in this district, Pat and Bridget shared the hardships and privations of the early settler and lived to view the reward that such industry and perseverance guaranteed in the land of their adoption.

They stood forth in sharp contrast with the agricultural class in other lands, in the origin of their title to and the nature of their possession of, the soil they cultivated. They entered upon the tremendous task of hewing out of the forests of the town of Rudolph a farm and a home, not as the tenant of some feudal lord, wearing the collar of servitude and yielding all of the better portion of their produce as a return for protection to him as weakling laborers.

Self reliant and self dependent, they took from nature the lease of their estate, rent free and bondage free. Not, howev-

er, free of cost and without price, but the price they paid was the price manhood and womanhood loves to render for the gains which do it honor.

It was the cost of that labor which builds up the true citizen; with privations which strengthen rather than enervate; and facing perils which exalt the soul.

With every trunk they lifted to its place in the cabin wall, a new layer of strength was added to their character. Every square of ground they subdued by their joint efforts at cultivation, gave new breadth to their views. Every peril they surmounted, every conflict they won, refined and sublimated the spirit of their lives.

And when, after years of such discipline of labor and trial, standing by the door of his castle of logs, Patrick Conway heard the sound of the voice of his loyal and contented housewife within and the voices of happy children round about...

While his eyes swept the fruitful possessions he had wrought from the wilderness, to their sufficient support and comfort, he realized the individual independence of free manhood, and the blessings of a free country which made possible the accomplishments of the subjects of this sketch...

Patrick and Bridget Conway, who came to Wood County, a remote wilderness, and who brought with them the best type of Christian civilization.

So it was said, in 1923, of the immigrants.

06-05-06

Nehring

When my friend Hank was born, his dad wasn't there to say hello. Fred Nehring had told Hank's mother, Hattie, that he was going up north to work in the woods; but he didn't come back. That was 83 years ago.

"I don't really know what county I was born in," Hank told me at his 1320 Apple St. home. "I was born out in the woods on the Marathon and Wood county line in a little log house like Abraham Lincoln: one room downstairs and one room upstairs.

Hank lived with his mother's parents, Fred and Wilhelmina Miller, his older brother Walter, sister Lydia and Uncle Art Miller. For support, Fred had left behind a little white horse named Dolly and a nanny goat.

He had liked to go to the tavern with Dolly pulling him on a stone boat and the goat seated beside him. Arriving home, "Ma would have to drag him into the house."

When Hank was 17 years of age, "a guy from Nekoosa" said he was going up to see Hank's namesake, Uncle Henry Miller, in Park Falls, Wis. "My ma wanted to go. She liked to bum any place.

"You like to go too, Heinie?" They called me that from the moment I was born, I guess. It snowed and that '37 Olds barely made it up there. There wasn't no road to the buildings; you had to walk. That was up at Kaiser.

"My uncle saw the lights of the car.

He came out of the cabin with a kerosene lantern. He looked us all over.

'Oh, it's you and you and you. Say, you can't guess who's here.'

"We went in and there he sat, by the wood box, a man without a right hand.

"My uncle said, 'Now here, Fred, is your youngest son.'

"It was my dad. He stuck out his good hand. We shook hands. That was the first time I ever seen him. He didn't say nothing to Ma and Ma didn't say nothing to him. They were quiet.

"The next day, we went hunting by Butternut. Just the guy that brought us up and my Uncle Henry and me and my dad. I remember that song was new, 'I lost my thrill on Blueberry Hill.' Not Fats Domino, someone else. My dad kept playing it over and over in the tavern.

"The next day, we went hunting again but the old man disappeared. He stayed with his brother-in-law, Henry Miller, until he got kicked out. Never could leave women alone.

"Then I seen him again at my brother's house. He was living in Tustin with another old guy. He came up to visit.

"The third time, a guy by the name of Nels Johnson knew the old man and brought him to my DX gas station at 12th and West Grand. I invited him to come over for supper.

"My wife said, 'That's okay.' But he didn't come.

"Boy, he could fight and he could shoot. He could do anything with the one hand. I'll tell you how strong he was. He was skin and bones about like

me except he didn't have a belly like me.

"I was bachin' it at the Bandelin Hotel at the time. They called it the Grand Avenue Tap later on, by Romanski's.

"My brother was 200 pounds. He lay on the floor on his back. My old man bent over and picked him up by the belt with his teeth. Yeah, he was a powerful guy. Up north, he hit a guy with his stub and the guy died. They tried him for murder but the other guy started the fight.

"He stayed with another old codger out at Tustin. I don't know exactly when he died. I know he had money before that because he bought a brand new Chevrolet truck. He was 82 years old.

"A friend of mine said she used to see an old guy that hung around the old tavern at Tustin, liked to play pool and play cards. He had his right hand off, she said. 'I bet that was your dad.'"

06-12-06

City Point

In the good old days, things were bad all over. With much of the world in the economic depression of the 1930s, the grass wasn't much greener on the other side, encouraging a sense of common interest.

Remembered fondly by many were "CCC" camps that put young men to work at government expense.

March 31, 1938, brought the fifth anniversary of the Civilian Conservation Corps, "which has probably received more praise and less criticism than any other of the government's alphabetical agencies," according to the *Daily Tribune*.

South of Wisconsin Rapids was Camp Petenwell and a "side camp" at Nepco lake that employed 50 young men, planting and raising seedlings. In the swamps west of Rapids was City Point.

A couple years after its August 14, 1934, construction, the City Point camp held one of its annual anniversary open houses. Of 206 "enrollees" in Company 2621, most came from central Wisconsin counties. They were directed by eight foresters and the camp superintendent, J.E. Tenney. One account says enrollees received \$30 a month of which \$25 was sent home to parents and families.

The principal project in 1936 was the construction of a 13-mile truck road between City Point and Mather that would enable motorized forest fighters to reach tens of thousands of acres. Built with the aid of a narrow-gauge railroad, it aver-

aged about five feet above marsh level. The road was considered a companion to another main trail about twelve miles long, running east and west "across a similar territory," one of the first large projects completed by the camp. Over the winter, the enrollees repaired dikes and dams in an area now characterized mainly by cranberry marshes.

The April 14, 1939, sixth anniversary tours included educational buildings, barracks, mess hall, work shop, dispensary, recreation building and personnel quarters.

A report said the camp had been established for drought relief but was changed to a forestry detachment. It had been located at City Point because of the large amount of reforestation needed in that district. The camp had planted about 700,000 trees annually.

A reminiscence by Peter Gallas includes a passage about Camp City Point. In 1938, he was part of a camp boxing team that entered the Golden Glove tournaments in Wisconsin Rapids, Gallas said.

Six feet tall and slim, the 147-pound welterweight injured his hand in practice. He didn't know it was broken though he was in so much pain he couldn't tie his shoe strings. His military coach told him to dress for the fight anyway. If the opponent didn't show up, Gallas would win by a forfeit.

But when the guy did appear, the Captain encouraged Gallas to fight anyway and told him to keep jabbing his Native American opponent in the face with the

good left hand. After three rounds, Gallas wrote, his left arm got so tired, he had to grab and clinch and hang on as long as he could.

"What's the matter with that boy's right hand?" he said he heard spectators ask.

A February 1939 Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune* also chronicled the match. "Wading into each other for three rounds, Pete Gallas of CCC Camp City Point and Sylvester Jackson, Lac du Flambeau Indian, slugged fast and furious in a novice 147-pound match, Gallas taking a decision."

"Stan Bartkowski, City Point CCC boxer, took an edge to win over Clarence Molepski of the Tri-Cities Boxing club in another welter match."

At the camp in the evenings, the CCC boys played guitar, shot pool and played dice. Beds were moved aside to set up a small boxing ring.

One Christmas Eve, the Army truck took the enrollees to Marshfield. Being a singer and loving music, "Bing" Gallas went into a tavern and stood near the door watching people dance. Unexpectedly, a man accused Gallas of ogling his dancing partner and said he was going to take it out on him. In a fit of jealousy, the heavy, well-developed man pummeled Gallas to the floor and choked him.

Finally, Gallas turned the man over flat on the floor, shouting that it was Christmas Eve and they were supposed to be living in peace, putting an end to the fracas.

06-26-06

Sphagnum Czar

In 1929, a man walked into one of the big florist shops in Boston. “Those are the most beautiful roses I’ve seen in a long time. I’d like to send a dozen to my wife, but I’m afraid they wouldn’t keep. I want to ship some narcissus bulbs too. Does there happen to be any way to pack them so they would stand an express run to Denver, Colorado?”

The clerk smiled confidently. “Why, yes, sir. I think we could. The ordinary way would be to transfer the order to our correspondent at Denver, but if you have a fancy to these particular roses, I’m sure we can pack them so they will keep all right.”

Going to a box behind the counter, the clerk picked a handful of vine-like plants and held them up for inspection. “This is sphagnum moss. When properly dampened and carefully packed around the bulbs and the flower stems, you would be surprised how long the plants will keep fresh.”

“What is sphagnum moss and where does it come from?” the customer wanted to know. Many of you readers are just as curious.

He was told that it is a species of moss which grows only in peat bogs and marshes and is composed of cellular tissue capable of holding about 15 times its weight in water, for a long period.

“This came,” the clerk concluded, “from a Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., concern which we are told controls the product of large areas of marshland, ly-

ing west of that city.”

Add to River City’s accolades: sphagnum marsh capital of the world.

More info:

Sphagnum moss grows commonly in damp, shady places in many parts of the north temperature zone. After centuries of alternate growth and death, it forms peat. In the 1920s, about 80 per cent of the sphagnum used commercially in the United States and Canada came from about 100 square miles of marshes around City Point and Mather.

Commercial gathering and sale of sphagnum moss in Wisconsin seems to have begun in the late 1880s by Z.K. Jewett and Frank Hancock, who operated independently of each other at Mather and later at City Point. The industry developed slowly but as the produce became known, sales increased. In 1928, production had been 175,000 bales.

Moss was systematically harvested by hand with hooks made especially for the purpose, then piled like hay, and when as dry as it was going to get, baled.

Sphagnum moss grows from two to three inches annually and a marsh area once harvested will not yield another crop for five years. In the 1920s, the moss-producing territory had been much too large to harvest, even in a five year period.

With the exception of the Bissig Bros., who began operations in 1911, and sold their product un-harvested, the large producers had consolidated their selling in the Wisconsin Sphagnum Moss Sales company of Rapids, fully 75 percent of the state product being sold thorough it.

Sales were made to nurserymen, florists and manufacturers of funeral wreaths and designs all over the United States and Canada. Florists received the highest grade, shipped in burlap-wrapped bales 45 inches long, from 20-25 pounds each.

Still another use for the moss was that of super-angler Isaak Walton to “scour” worms for “piscatorial purposes.” You stuff the moss in a jar, dig up some worms, put them in the jar, and after a couple days they will be almost transparent, tough and lively, making an effective trout lure.

In the 1980s, James A. Retzlaff (1923-2003), of Wisconsin Rapids, intimated to me that he was the sphagnum moss czar and that I should look into the topic some day.

During World War II, Jim had flown numerous missions over Germany when his plane was shot down over the Danube River. After swimming to shore, he was captured and held prisoner until war’s end. Upon return from the service, Jim graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and started his business career by founding the North American Moss Co.

While growing and distributing sphagnum moss throughout the United States, he held patents for a number of pertinent machines that alleviated much of the hard manual work previously required in this field thus enabling Retzlaff to claim the moss throne.

07-04-06

Worst Generation

The greatest generation quickly recognized ours as the worst. Now “Grandma” and “Grandpa,” we are the juvenile delinquents of the 1950s and 1960s.

Our crimes included littering, loitering, smoking, stealing, sneering, dealing, brawling, bowling, vandalism, cynicism, agnosticism, inebriation, cerebration, lascivious conduct and intercourse. Our screen idols were sociopaths: Marlon Brando, James Dean and John Wayne.

We followed any stupid fad foisted upon us by the foisters: flat tops, duck tails, goose steps, engineer boots, switchblade knives, Fudgesicles. We were degenerate, poorly-dressed, bizarrely-coiffed and apathetic; what’s more, we didn’t care. We also passed along old, sick jokes and read *Mad* magazine.

Even as we puffed straws behind the barn and injected aspirin into our Cokes, a mounting wave of juvenile delinquency was noted by northern Wisconsin church leaders in 1955. Juvenile gangs similar to those in metropolitan areas had appeared in Eagle River and Jab Switch Junction.

Churches, police and parents of the greatest generation were cooperating to supervise the gangs and “channel their interest to constructive pursuits.” Probably the most egregious influence in the degrading of society was television, an effect apparent in lowered attendance at evening church services. In fact, television viewing had reduced participation in all community activities.

For its part, the *Daily Tribune* penned an editorial entitled, “Time to Apply the Needle to Epidemic of Vandalism.”

A 1955 editorial focused on Halloween “prankery,” describing the activities of a band of young “ruffians” that descended upon Plank Hill school in the town of Port Edwards, breaking 27 windows, overturning an outhouse, entering the school and smashing a water cooler.

Windows were broken and a toilet overturned at Ross school, also in the town of Saratoga. Toilets were tipped at Pine Grove in Seneca and the Wittenberg school in the town of Port Edwards.

In the town of Grand Rapids, “a brazen, strong-armed crew” carted away the outdoor toilet from the home of Julius Peters on 4th Street South and “under cover of darkness” moved the building to the horseshoe drive at Lincoln High school. A bicycle was hoisted to the top of the Emerson school flagpole.

Houses were splashed with black paint and windows broken. On the county jail, a sign had been appended: “Rooms for Rent.” Out of town, fences were torn up, machinery driven into ditches and corn shocks deposited in a roadway. Over the summer season at Lake Wazeecha, toilets were overturned, tables and benches tossed into the lake, garbage cans tipped, beer cans strewn about and bottles and light bulbs broken.

Brawls in public places were becoming commonplace. At the Hickory Pit, an all-night restaurant east of the city on Highway 54, there were three fights in three successive nights. A Rudolph lad, 16, on parole from the Boys School at

Waukesha, broke a bottle over the bumper of a car and attacked a companion. A drunken melee followed that was broken up when the proprietor of the restaurant, Mrs. Louise Hewitt, called police. Five girls were among the group apprehended. The oldest had her 4-month-old baby with her when the battle broke out at about 3:30 a.m.

Tribune: “It is shocking to realize that our community harbors among its youth a criminal element which has utter disdain for private and public property rights and which destroys for the pure deviltry of it. Certainly the time is at hand when such goings-on can no longer be tolerated on the assumption that ‘boys will be boys.’”

Hardly a week passed, said the *Tribune*, during which it did not carry items about petty rowdyism. Sometimes the damage was to public buildings, such as the window-breaking at the Wood County Courthouse and Wood County College. “Can it be that the parents of these young ruffians do not care what mischief their sons are up to? Or is it that they simply do not feel a sufficient degree of parental responsibility to inquire into the hours and company which their offspring are keeping?”

The parents would pay their dues eventually, said the *Tribune*, in the future support of the penal institutions toward which their wayward sons were heading.

Something would have to be done but what? (To be continued.)

07-10-06

Shoplifting

The boys were bad. In the 1950s and 1960s, respectable citizens were advised to avoid youthful jack-booted thugs carrying switch-blade knives in back pockets of low-slung jeans and Tommy guns beneath black leather jackets; these were the juvenile delinquents. Mom and Pop might find themselves looking down the barrel of a weapon loaded with a cartridge of liquid the teenage lunatic might propel their direction with wetting force.

How did the wild ones come to possess these metallic plastic, arm-length, \$1 submachine-gun squirt guns? The rumblers of River City had heisted them from dime stores by sticking the ungainly smoothbores down their pants' legs.

In last week's *Memoirs*, the charge against the worst generation was vandalism. This week, it's shoplifting, also known as hocking, cobbing, copping, lifting or "taking the five-finger discount" and, in the Sixties A.D. (after drugs), as ripping off or scoring.

Bad boys stole anything that didn't bite and a few things that did. Out in the countryside, they "cooned" grapes, apples, cucumbers or rutabagas. Sometimes the harvest was hurled at passing vehicles or sold at black market roadside stands in neighboring townships.

Later, rather than risk a peppering of rock salt from a Vesper or Kellner farmer, bad boys snuck to the front of IGA on the developing Highway 13 strip, hoisted watermelons and raced to the vacant lot around back where they cracked the

melons and stuck bad faces into pulp that was all the sweeter for being illegal.

Young bad boys from Grove school plundered stores of 8th Street from Glick's bait shop to the Charcoal Grill. Gas stations and corner groceries provided a pirate's booty of otherwise adults-only cigars, cigarillos and cigarettes. Soda pop from self-service coolers at Stewart's grocery was consumed on site by Boy Scouts and not paid for or, for the price of one, two or three were quaffed.

Bad boys from Lincoln high school raided Haney's drug store for Baby Ruth candy bars, Sen-Sen and Brylcreem. Bad boys stole the head from Lincoln's statue in the high school foyer and secreted it in Coach Knauer's vehicle in an attempt to induce a heart attack.

At the end of the day, the lads slicked back their ducktails and headed for the Friendly Fountain to celebrate and try to figure out how to get money out of the pinball machine.

Downtown, any department of Woolworth's was prime shoplifting territory and bad girls were known to emerge double and triple-dressed from Johnson Hill's.

Bad boys and girls snuck through back doors of the three downtown theaters and/or concealed themselves in the trunks of automobiles to steal into the Highway 13 "outdoor." Other nights, they lied about their age and assumed false identities to claim a cheaper ticket.

Buying (or stealing) magic markers, bad boys sold counterfeit hand checks at

a cut rate to willing girls outside Elks Club charity dances. One individual carved an elaborate fake "Palace" stamp and cheated owner Ted Walrath of the price of admission.

When it came time to try unlawful alcohol, bad boys stole beer and booze by the bottle and case, from grocery stores and the liquor cabinets of parents and neighbors. At a time when 18-year-olds could belly up to the bar, bad boys routinely snatched beer paraphernalia (and traffic signs) until teen bedrooms looked like Old Milwaukee museums.

In one particularly wicked case, bad boys visited Grandma on false pretenses and clobbered a bottle of licorice-flavored German liqueur from her fruit cellar only to pay later at Art's when headaches and nausea substituted for conscience.

In a "funniest home movie" of teenage crime, a bad boy bent on busting into the cash register lowered himself through a gas station garage window into a vat of used engine oil.

The discussion could continue indefinitely; but it's time for bad boys to confess to Father Wagner, beg forgiveness from Woolworth manager Louis Shugart, apologize to principal Marvin Maire and cough up a hefty fine to police chief Rudy Exner. Time for bad boys, flush with the ill-gotten gains of a lifetime, to begin writing the checks that will begin to atone for their life of crime.

(To be continued.)

07-17-06

Winden Part One

At the Wisconsin Rapids school board meeting, A.B. Bever interrupted a motion-to-adjourn with some new business. "Some of you," he said on March 14, 1932, "took it upon yourselves to fire [superintendent of schools] Mr. Winden. You held a secret meeting in a 'hayloft' and ran it gangster fashion. After voting him out of office you notified him that his contract would not be renewed and demanded his resignation.

"Now I want to make a motion to reconsider that action, to get the true expression of every member's opinion."

Terming Bever's accusation an "insult," board president Guy Nash said the meeting at which it was voted to request Mr. Winden's resignation was "called, not as a regular meeting of the board, but as a private gathering of the board members, in order to have a frank discussion of the matter without embarrassing Mr. Winden," who, as secretary of the board was present at all official sessions.

Every member had been notified of the private meeting, said Nash, but Bever and Mrs. Edward Hougen were unable to attend, which Bever admitted was true but declared that the purpose of the meeting had not been known.

Mrs. A.F. Gottschalk stated that the question of Mr. Winden's dismissal took her so by surprise that she hardly knew how she voted. "I felt I should give the matter more consideration," she said, "but thought that if the rest of the board desired a change, my vote wouldn't

make any difference."

Nash said he had told Bever and Hougen of the actions, and that they had both agreed.

"I didn't say any such thing," Bever broke in. "I told you that if the rest of the members felt that way about it, it would have to be all right with me. Since then I have found out that the board was far from unanimous on the matter."

"Then I take it, I'm a liar?" queried Mr. Nash.

"Take it any way you want," replied Bever. "It was pretty rotten business, that's all I've got to say."

After the passage of a motion to reconsider the resignation, W.J. Taylor declared that, "in all fairness to Mr. Nash, I think those present at the meeting in question should say something in his behalf. If we as members of the board of education can sit here and say that we were so taken by surprise that we didn't vote according to our honest convictions then we all ought to be back in school again instead of trying to run a school system! We're a bunch of jellyfish if we haven't the courage and common sense to say 'I feel this way about it' and then stick to our decision."

For his part, Winden said he had held the office for nine years and that this was the first time he had any idea that his services were not satisfactory. "May I ask, Mr. Nash, what are your objections to me?"

"Principally because you are always on the fence."

"I've made decisions when I've had to," answered Winden. "You'll recall

that on several occasions they were against you."

"You've always been on the side of those who were on top. I opposed your selection in the first place because I felt you weren't competent."

Winden said that Nash had come to him just after the special meeting and a few hours before the regular January meeting and requested his resignation.

John E. Schnabel said he had been a member of the board a only short time when the subject of a new superintendent came up. "I didn't know much about the school system but had always considered Mr. Winden a capable man for the job, and had heard many fine comments on his work."

Bever said he hoped all members would "lay their cards on the table" and stated that "we have as good a school system as there is in the state."

A motion for a new vote on the original question of accepting the resignation was made by Bever.

Madsen offered an amendment to delay action until the April meeting but the amendment was defeated 4-3 with Madsen, Taylor and Nash voting in favor and Bever, Gottschalk, Hougen and Schnabel against.

The same votes were tolled against accepting the resignation.

"Well, there you are," said President Nash when Secretary Winden announced the result.

Said the *Daily Tribune*, "A long silence ensued, which was finally broken by a motion to adjourn."

07-24-06

Recall

In February 1932, after being bewitched, badgered and beleaguered for several years, Julius Winden said he was quitting the teaching profession to live on his farm near Wisconsin Rapids. In fact, he had been fired as that city's school superintendent, shortly after an impressive new Lincoln high school building and field house had been built.

Winden, principal of Lincoln for three years, had been "elected" by school board "commissioners" in 1923. One of his first actions was to employ J.A. Torresani to start a physical education program.

Perhaps Winden got on the bad side of some locals in April 1931 when he refused to permit school skipping for the first day of trout fishing. Perhaps it was the 1931 homecoming in which drunkenness, theft and disorder occurred in and around the field house. For sure, he had made an enemy in school board president Guy Nash, who demanded Winden's resignation at the January meeting of the board.

The *Daily Tribune* bade a tepid farewell: "Parents in this whole community sending their youngsters to the city schools, particularly the high school will regret to learn of Mr. Winden's resignation and will wish him well in his new connection after he serves out the term of his local contract this spring." Mrs. Winden would be especially missed, having been tireless in club work, welfare and community enterprises.

In March 1932, petitions asked for recall of board members who wanted Winden out: Guy Nash, president, W.J. Taylor and Arthur Madsen. John Schnabel also voted for Winden's resignation; he would be up for reelection April 5, opposed by F.F. Mengel.

The Central Labor union joined the pro-Winden faction.

At a public meeting with 150 present, the audience, "taken aback by the brevity of the meeting booed lustily" as the board left to look at 50 applications for the job. When Winden appeared, the group applauded.

"Everybody is in a heated condition," board member Arthur Madsen said, "and we need time to cool off."

Hearing that students at Lincoln high school planned a walkout to protest Winden's dismissal, the board went on record against such "mob action."

What the *Tribune* called "juvenile agitation" included "Winden" painted on the stand pipe at the high school and "We want Winden" on the viaduct, McKercher Milling Co. grain elevator, Ahdawagam Paper Products Co. stand pipe and on sidewalks in front of board members' houses. Students chanting "In with Winden, out with Nash; clear the board of all the trash" led a snake dance downtown and through the halls of Lowell school. They interrupted public meetings and a piano recital by Raymond Vickers. Some of the bolder "children" entered W.J. Taylor's house and stopped in front of Principal A.A. Ritchay's house but did not enter.

The entire school walked out on strike, recalled Bill Heilman, a 1933 graduate of LHS, at his 50-year reunion; Benjamin Marx said he was among the group that painted "We want Winden" around town.

Apparently, the walkout came to a quick halt when Winden confronted the students and asked them not to skip school on his account.

On March 30, petitions bearing 1,430 names were filed with county Judge Frank W. Calkins, calling for a special recall election against board members "not competently nor properly serving the best interests of the city."

A.J. Amundson, head of Wisconsin Sphagnum Moss Co., Wm. Schroeder, a carpenter, and Earl Sherman, a "garage-man," successfully opposed Nash, Taylor and Madsen in the special election May 17. It was believed to be the first case on record where a such recall was effective.

In the "final chapter," reported May 25, the newly-organized board unanimously reelected Winden for one year in a meeting interrupted by a group of students outside the high school building once again chanting, "We want Winden."

It would be up to the commissioners, board member Amundson said, to determine if there was any foundation to the charges against Winden. Meanwhile, "It is the duty of the board to do all in its power, through honest action, to heal the breach which has been caused by the recent furor."

07-31-06

Anti-Union Five

Wisconsin Rapids city superintendent of schools Julius Winden weathered the storms of '32 and went on to work in the district for the following four years.

In January 1936, reelected at a "lively session" of the school board, he pledged to seek restoration of harmony among teachers and recommended "removal from the system of those who attempt to destroy that harmony." He meant those who had organized a union during the early "Great Depression" years. Winden opposed the union and, with his approval, contracts were not extended to some 13-17 teachers.

The problems of the unionizing period aggravated the effects of his troubles with the 1932 school board and Winden resigned in April 1936 and was granted an immediate leave of absence. The *Stevens Point Journal* reported that a Rapids board member said Winden had suffered a nervous breakdown.

The board appointed Aaron A. Ritchay, Lincoln high school principal, as acting superintendent.

For its part, the Central Labor union circulated petitions to again recall the board of education, hoping to reinstate 13 discharged members of the Wisconsin Rapids Federation of Teachers.

The board members named were Mrs. A.F. (Mabel) Gottschalk, vice president of the board, Albert J. Amundson, F.F. Mengel, Earl Sherman and Mrs. Edward (Claradona) Hougen. Several had been installed after the 1932 recall of the anti-Winden faction.

Now, the "anti-union" five published their views in the *Daily Tribune*. "The issue is plain. Are the school authorities and the school board as a governing body to determine the policy of the schools, or is it to be determined by dissatisfied teachers, supported by some outside organization and outside influences?"

In the July recall election, three "union candidates" were elected to the school board: Arthur Rasmussen, George Marcoux and Earl Brennan.

In September 1936 board member or "commissioner" Carl Odegard protested he had been illegally barred from voting by board president Earl Sherman because Odegard owned a share of Wood County Telephone company stock in violation of state laws forbidding owners of utility stocks from holding city offices. The recently-elected commissioners restored Odegard's voting rights.

New superintendent of schools Floyd Smith told the board additional teachers were needed in the English and commercial departments of the high school. Consequently, Mary Y. Ritchie was to be re-hired as English teacher, Mary Ellen Neale as commercial instructor.

Mrs. Hougen protested the hiring of Ritchie and Neale. Both, she said, were "disloyal to the school board and the superintendent." The two belonged to the Wisconsin Rapids Teachers' Federation executive committee and had been active in negotiations for union recognition and a salary schedule, a process which led to denial of new contracts to them, resignation of superintendent Winden and the July 14 recall election.

Commissioner Brennan came to the teachers' defense with a plea that the board "look ahead, and not back" and give the teachers another chance. "I don't think we're looking ahead when we rehire teachers the old board refused to hire," Mrs. Hougen retorted.

Brennan: "Well, you feel one way about that, and we feel another. The question will never be remedied until we find out which side is right, and the only way we can find that out is by giving these teachers a new trial."

William F. Thiele suggested Supt. Smith be the sole judge of whether the teachers became "disloyal" to him or the board during the coming year. When Brennan protested that this would put the superintendent "on the spot," Thiele amended his amendment to make the board judge of any disloyalty.

Smith said he had no objection to Ritchie, who had an "A" rating the previous year, or to Neale. The rehiring was opposed only by Mrs. Hougen. Sherman remained silent as Thiele joined Marcoux, Brennan, Rasmussen and Odegard in approval.

In other board business, the Central Labor union was granted use of five school rooms for classes in workers' education and the Junior Association of Commerce was allowed to serve punch at the Cranberry Harvest Festival ball in the field house, "provided it is kept off the basketball floor."

In 1945, Julius Winden moved from Randolph, Wis. to Huntington Park, Cal., where he died in 1963 at age 89.

08-07-06

Sock and Roll

I don't care what people say, rock 'n' roll will always be, it'll go down in the history ... of the worst generation.

At first, there was some doubt in Santa Cruz, Calif., as reported 50 years ago by the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*. "City officials intent on dispelling any notion that Santa Cruz is the lair of the square, want it known that rock and roll dancing is not banned in this Pacific Coast resort."

Rock and roll, "along with other harmless types of swing music, enjoyable to young and old, "was welcomed, said the Santa Cruz city manager. "We have nothing against rock and roll music," chimed in the police chief, "It's just what some people do while listening to it."

"What some people do" was why public dancing to the more energetic type of "R&R" would not be tolerated. Police had cracked down on a dance at the civic auditorium when the music incited some teenagers to "obscene and highly suggestive dancing." The auditorium manager had canceled an engagement by another rock and roller "because his music attracts a certain type of crowd that would not be compatible to this particular community."

A July 1956 *Tribune* suggested, "Sock and Roll Is Better Title." A rock 'n' roll party aboard a Boston harbor excursion vessel turned into a near riot when numerous fights erupted among the persons aboard almost as soon as the

vessel left the dock and continued during the more than two hours of the cruise while the orchestra played "rock 'n' roll rhythms." Most of those on board were "Negroes" but police said racial issues were not involved in the fighting.

In another case, according to the *Tribune*, a young woman of 21 carried a baby in one hand while, with the other hand, she reached up and grabbed a "rock and roll" singer by the collar and started to pull. "You must come home with me. You MUST come home with me."

The singer in question had aroused in women from teenagers to matrons "the strongest urge since Frank Sinatra reigned supreme." The rock and roll singer caused riots and editorials and already had made a fortune.

A phenomenon of the times. A hillbilly singer with overtones of rhythm and blues. Hard to define and hard to understand the words. In person he worked himself up to such a pitch he often collapsed after a show. With all the shaking, wiggling, jumping and bumping, it was like watching a strip-teaser and a malted milk machine at the same time, said the *Tribune* sketch.

He was the first pop singer to have his album sell so well it was listed among the single records. Of course, he was Elvis Presley.

Elvis owned a pink and a yellow convertible Cadillac and a sedan for business purposes. Didn't smoke, drink or take dope. His entire diet consisted of pork chops, mashed potatoes and gravy. Even breakfast. Pretty good, said the

Tribune, for the son of a house painter who thought he'd be an electrician.

RCA and others predicted big things for the new "Swoon-Producer" and "Hottest Phenom," now looking into becoming the next Marlon Brando. "So it would seem that Elvis Presley is here to stay. If he can last long enough, this is."

At the same time, here in sleepy, square, central Wisconsin, there was still old time dance music being played at Skyway Ballroom, with George Middlecamp and His Troubadors; at Hillside west of Nekoosa, with Cliff Banks and His Orchestra; at Silver Dome, Neillsville, with Howie Sturtz; and at the Colonial Ballroom east of Wausau, with nationally renowned Louis Armstrong and his All Stars.

The Wisconsin theater on Grand Avenue in downtown Wisconsin Rapids was showing, "Rebel Without a Cause. The whole picture of the rock 'n' roll generation! This is their side of the story!" "Crime in the Streets" with James Whitmore, John Cassavetes and Sal Mineo. At Highway 13, "The Price of Fear" and "The Creature Walks Among Us."

The cat was out of the bag and wailing, "If you don't like rock 'n' roll, think what you've been missin'. But if you like to bop and stroll, come on down and listen. Let's all start to have a ball, everybody rock 'n' roll."

Finally, in conclusion, signaling the imminent cultural shift, "ah, oh baby, ah, oh baby, ah, oh baby, ah, oh baby, rock."

08-14-06

Curfew

Limburger might have been the last straw. A local resident informed police in March 1956 that he had exited the movie theater to find the fragrant cheese smeared over the engine of his car parked at 3rd Street and East Grand; more likely, he discovered it after the engine heated up. Someone had also slashed automobile tires that night, it was reported, although the tires reportedly didn't deflate until three days later. Just a couple of notes on delayed havoc wrought by the worst generation.

From five Wisconsin cities came mayors and chambers of commerce functionaries, themselves members, not of the worst but of the greatest generation, to ponder the youth delinquency problem. Presiding at the conference was Wisconsin Rapids mayor Nels M. Justeson, with the assistance of B.T. Ziegler, local Chamber manager, and Wisconsin Rapids Police Chief R.J. Exner. Other attendees came from Marshfield, Wausau, Merrill and Stevens Point.

Justeson said a youth center was not the answer. Although Stevens Point had opened such a center and reported success, several years before, a similar facility there had closed here for lack of interest. "I think we will all agree that the problem stems from

a growing lack of sense of responsibility of some parents today, those who expect the police, school officials and others to keep tabs on their children." He said that if we could straighten out even one per cent of the "wayward elements," it would be an accomplishment.

"There is no one solution to the problem," contributed Rapids police chief Exner, "but a curfew would prove a valuable aid in reducing it." A curfew would give police a tool "when they need it" and would penalize parents of violators.

Exner was also quoted elsewhere in the *Tribune* that, "We seek the opportunity to question boys and girls when they are found on the streets late at night." He reported a "spot survey" of youths seen on city streets after 11 p.m. on a Friday night. Officers counted 44 teenagers on streets, in restaurants or in cars, of which 11 were reported seen at 2:15 a.m. or later. On a Saturday night, 100 juveniles were counted, among whom 29 were seen later than 1 a.m.

The previous year, 108 persons under 18 were apprehended, compared to 165 in 1953, and 199 in 1943.

Under the curfew, anyone violating the provisions could be escorted home by a police officer. Should the violator disobey the officer's prior warning to go home, a fine would be imposed against the parent or guardian. After a

written warning, the fine for the first offense would be \$5, escalating with each violation.

Youths who attended organized activities would be allowed one hour to return to their homes.

The *Tribune* endorsed curfew hours for those under 17. It would be enforced between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. on weekdays, midnight on Friday and Saturday and 10:30 on Sundays. "Even teenagers approaching 17 need firm, sensible guidance and most of them will admit this, if only to themselves."

"This is not a vicious ordinance," said Alderman Clarence Lukaszewski, chairman of the general business committee which drew up the ordinance.

Before voting, the aldermen listened to an "eloquent" plea by a member of the Lincoln high school student council in opposition to the curfew. John Kingdon said only 41 per cent of seniors at the school favored the ordinance. "The reason we are against the ordinance is because it is impractical, it would be difficult to enforce and it is unfair and unjust to the majority of the teenagers."

08-21-06

Courthouse

Magnificent,” they said, about the big, new, modern, functional and flat-topped Wood County courthouse that had replaced an antiquated facility of the elaborate style.

A dedication ceremony in early August 1956 featured keynote speakers Theodore W. Brazeau, Wisconsin Rapids, and Charles M. Pors, Marshfield, introduced by emcee Circuit Judge Herbert A. Bunde.

Of the county board and its building committee, Brazeau said, “They wisely perceived that the expenditure for a public building of this nature, which is to last for many years, should not be niggardly, but should be liberal enough to accomplish the purpose of its being. The building they planned incorporates strength, beauty and utility ... [and] reflects the dignity and stability of government, and invites the respect of our citizens.”

Brazeau observed that the old structure, built in 1881, “has long since failed to comply with the needs of the county in size, convenience and safety, and it is with little regret that we bid it farewell. “Years pass on and in time we outgrow the things our fathers thought best.

“As we dedicate it to the purposes of government, let us also, as citizens of this county, dedicate our lives to good, honorable, unselfish citizenship. Stone and masonry, spacious and luxurious offices may inspire, but do not make upright people. Buildings are temporary, but justice and righteousness are eternal.

More than ever we need, besides beautiful buildings, a citizenry intelligent, honest and unselfish.”

Pors, representing the northern part of the county, said, “I feel in truth and in fact that there is no North Wood County, nor is there a South Wood County. We are all residents of the county of Wood.

“It is true that there is a rivalry between the various sections, but it is not based on jealousy; rather, it is based upon endeavor and the desire to achieve... which enures to the benefit of the whole county.

“This building is a symbol of the county’s unity, with the general contractor from the north, the architect from the south; the electrical work performed by a firm from the north, the plumbing from the south, and with the wood paneling which decorates some of the rooms being produced by a firm in the northern part of the county.”

Pors said that no class of buildings in Wisconsin affects more people than a courthouse with such services as the keeping of vital statistics of births, marriages and deaths, the records of which are permanently preserved. Each piece of real estate is recorded and its ownership and changes of ownership also kept on record in the building. At the courthouse, those who violate law are given justice and those who feel their personal or private rights have been invaded have their day in court. The estates of all who die are administered through probate courts.

Other, more workaday phases of government also transpired within the

courthouse walls, Pors said, such as the meetings of the county board and its committees.

Board chairman Alba F. Bump, town of Marshfield, welcomed the “throng” of 800 gathered in the courthouse square and briefly reviewed the county’s first 100 years.

Commander Raymond H. Flynn of Buckley-Baldwin Post No. 2534 Veterans of Foreign Wars presented Bump an American flag that had been flown over the nation’s capitol.

Bump and Flynn hoisted the flag on the 70-foot flagpole at the center of the courthouse plaza while a bugler sounded, “To the Colors” followed by the national anthem, played by the Wisconsin Rapids city band and the Marshfield Civil Air Patrol band.

A brief address of welcome by Frank D. Abel, chairman of the dedication committee, and an invocation by Rev. E.G. Kuechle, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran church, had opened the program, which closed with a benediction by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. C.W. Gille, pastor of SS. Peter & Paul Catholic church.

Other distinguished guests introduced by Bunde included the mayors of Rapids, Pittsville and Marshfield, Rep. Melvin R. Laird, State Sen. W.W. Clark, Assemblymen Arthur J. Crowns Jr. and John S. Crawford, county board members and architect Donn Hougen whose solid-rock creation overlooks the Grand Rapids of the Wisconsin and the peculiar county of Wood beyond.

08-28-06

Judge Cate

Not a good omen. As Wood County came into being, it was the site of a “shocking” murder.

In February 1856, the accused sat in jail at Plover, seat of the mother county, Portage. From the Stevens Point *Pinery* of March 15, 1856: “Lane, the murderer of Rainer, at Grand Rapids last month, had his trial this week at Plover, before Judge Cate. The proceedings have elicited great interest...

“The case, after a two day’s trial, went to the jury last night. We have not heard the verdict. Should it be one of acquittal, there might be trouble, as there are quite a number of citizens of all parties and nationalities, who regard it as a most cold-blooded and brutal murder upon a young, inoffensive German, whom all thought well of.

“Great commendation is made of the patient bearing of Judge Cate, and the impartial, faithful manner he has provided during this, and other tedious cases of the term.

“Later.—Lane was found guilty of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to the State Prison for life.”

The judge, George Washington Cate, had moved from Montpelier, Vt., in 1845. As a young student of law, he worked in a sawmill and rafted logs to St. Louis, Mo., prior to locating in Plover. The only other lawyer in the locality was James S. Alban, who died at the Civil War battle of Shiloh and had a township named after him.

Cate, a member of the Wisconsin assembly from 1852-1853, moved from Plover to Stevens Point and was elected judge of the circuit court in 1854. He continued in that capacity until 1875 when he was elected to Congress as a Democrat in what was then a Republican district.

Cate was defeated in the next election and resumed the practice of law in Stevens Point, residing at 321 Ellis St. with his family. He died in 1905.

In 1896, he related a story about the first session of the United States court ever held in Portage County, Wisconsin Territory. The site was an unfurnished warehouse in the Village of Plover on Monday, August 25, 1845.

Present were: David Irwin, Judge; George W. Mitchell, deputy United States Marshall; Nelson Strong, Sheriff; and George Wyatt, Clerk. “Sheriff Strong being out of the territory, he appointed George W. Mitchell Under-sheriff, and Mitchell appointed William Fellows of little Bull Falls and a man named Wilder deputy sheriffs for the term. A grand jury was in attendance, some of which had traveled a hundred miles for that purpose. It was an event looked forward to by the isolated population scattered in logging camps, at sawmills and shingle shanties remote from each other.

“A first term of court in a western country was an epoch. Everybody attended. Frequently campfires were built and people sat about them all night. A load of people came from Madison, 125 miles, in a two-horse wagon to see

the first term of court in the pinery. All the possible elements of character were represented from the ‘strictly temperate’ to the ‘half seas over’. By the time the grand jury had been sworn in, the latter were becoming prominent.

“One Robert Wakely, a man of high social qualities, whose good nature never forsook him even when drunk, rode his horse into the courtroom by the wide door, just to salute the Judge. He held his hat off to the right of his head as in military salute, looking straight at the Judge, a sweet smile lighting up his countenance, and softly singing that ancient lullaby commencing, ‘Hush my babe, Be still and slumber,’ all the time forcing his horse along.

“The Judge was wild. He was recently from old Virginia, a man of great learning and a high appreciation of the law. He demanded the arrest of the intruder. Many thought it funny and would pat Wakely on the back, but more frowned upon it.

“The Marshall had stepped from the room and the Deputy Sheriffs were slow to act, Mitchell was sent for. He came and proved himself to be a man who not only knew his duty but also had the nerve to do it. He speedily took Wakely from his horse and had him before the Court. The result was that he, Wakely, was severely reprimanded and imprisoned in the Marshall’s bedroom a day or two and then Judge Catlin of Madison, an old and highly respected citizen, obtained his release by reason of the many good qualities of Wakely.”

09-04-06

Union School

Our town? “Shall it still be known as ‘a den of ignorance and vice,’ or shall it rise in the full splendor of intellectual and moral development, to radiate intelligence and purity wherever its influence shall be felt? Shall it in the future be the home of real worth and virtue, or shall it be the hiding place of the drunkard, the gambler, the licentious of every caste, who shrink from the light and purity of other communities?”

“Let it be known through some channel, that we have the elements of civilization, refinement and virtue here, and thus draw in worthy citizens, and by degrees root out vice, and so open the way to a glorious future...”

A letter to the editor, 1862, regarding the effect of a good education upon the reprobates who gravitate here.

A school (though not the first) was built in Grand Rapids in 1861 (and, in Centralia, south of the Market Square).

From the *Wood County Reporter*, of Dec. 21, 1861: “The new [Grand Rapids] school house is nearly completed. School will probably begin by the 10th of January. We learn that competent teachers have been engaged.”

Another entry stated, “The new Union School House is completed, we learn, with the exception of one room, which required graining [of the woodwork]. Competent teachers have been engaged.”

Jan. 11, 1862: “Our schoolhouse is about finished, and it is expected that the first term will commence by the first of next month.

Feb. 1, 1862: THE UNION SCHOOL. “Last Friday we took a glance at the interior of the new school house, and find it neatly finished. The rooms, three in all, are high, capacious, and in every way commendatory to the architects, Edminster and Stevenson. The wood work on the interior is tastefully grained in imitation of oak and butternut. A large portion of the work was done by Mr. Salomon, reflecting credit on him as a workman of taste and neatness. On the whole the building, outward and inward, is an ornament to our town and should be appreciated by our citizens.”

A letter from “Justice,” Sept. 6, 1862: “Very few know that they could afford their families the advantages of even a medium school here. I have met some who were surprised to hear that we had any school *at all*!

“But, sir, permit me to say to all, we have good educational facilities here. I have been connected with the schools of our State for the past twelve years, and I am happy to be able to say that there are few towns in Wisconsin, of the size of this, that can show a better school house or school, than we have here.”

October 4, 1862: G.F. Witter, Wood County Superintendent of Schools, examined teachers at each of the three districts: Grand Rapids, for all who would teach in the towns of Grand Rapids and Saratoga; Centralia for the towns of Centralia, Seneca and Rudolph; and Dexter, for in the towns of Exeter, Lincoln and Springfield.

A letter to the editor from a “Student,” Sept. 3, 1874: “The Teachers convened

at the School House last Monday...The exercises thus far have been conducted by Prof. Stewart of Waukesha...

“Mr. Powers has solicited several of our citizens to give lectures before the class during its session, and we understand that several have signified a willingness to do so.”

Oct. 14, 1875: “OUR SCHOOL.”

“We visited our school last week, twice, now under the supervision of Prof. Stewart as Principal. We walked in as any visitor ought, without ceremony, without knocking, taking the first vacant seat we came to, looked on, noted this and that, and retired when we were ready so to do...

“We found the Principal’s room full of studious pupils attending to business. Mr. S. is proving himself a rare educator.

“Miss Grace is doing remarkably well as Assistant. In the lower departments, we found Miss Fannie Baker in the Intermediate Department, alive to the fact that some seventy little heads had ideas, and that she was there to teach them how to shoot. Miss Fanny is doing excellently well. She will make an admirable teacher.

“Miss Dougherty in the Primary Department seems to comprehend the fact that a demand will be made upon the “Primary” for recruits for the “Intermediate,” by and by and is conducting herself accordingly.

“The little ones all love her, and we almost wished we were a little one.”

09-11-06

County Centennial

Does it surprise you that our Wood County acreage was once part of a foreign country? We were claimed by Spain, France and Britain before the American Revolution, according to the 1956 Centennial Edition of the *Daily Tribune*. Following wars between France and Britain and between Britain and the rebel Americans, we became part of the Northwest Territory of the United States. In the early 1800s, this was part of the county of St. Clair, Indiana Territory. In 1809, county St. Clair and Illinois Territory were detached from Indiana Territory, making us part of Illinois.

During the War of 1812, Britain again, until the U.S. exerted practical control through military posts at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien. With the admission of Illinois as a state in 1818, we were Michigan Territory. After Michigan became a state in 1835, Wisconsin was designated a territory in its own right.

Between 1836 and 1848, white men other than trappers and voyeurs began to arrive in search of raw materials, primarily white pine.

The state of Wisconsin was formed in 1848.

In 1856, the County of Wood was set up as one township until a regular county government was set up.

The Centennial Edition told of rough sawmill towns along the banks of the Wisconsin and Yellow rivers and their tributaries. Political subdivisions were quickly established to bring order and regulate activities.

Later, as the “pinery” receded from the streams that transported logs to market, railroads filled the need, and hardwoods as well as pines found their way south.

From the Age of Exploitation, we progressed to the Age of Industry and Agriculture that preceded the present Age of Acquisition. The cycle was repeated in counties from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In some cases, as the trees that brought in the early immigrants disappeared, so did the settlements. Other communities made the transition to new enterprises.

Grand Rapids and Centralia merged and grew to become Wisconsin Rapids, a center of paper manufacture. In 1956, we ranked 22nd in population among the cities of the state. [In 2009, we were 37th.]

In the northwestern corner of Wood County, the coming of the railroad inspired Marshfield, which had evolved from a lumbering town to a trading center. A small mill that made furniture in 1956 sent veneer from Marshfield “to all the world” and made that hub city a manufacturing town, 26th in population among Wisconsin cities. [In 2009, it is 36th.]

“The soil that nurtured the pines of a hundred years ago produces another kind of wealth today, and on thousands of acres where once was heard the sound of cross-cut saw and axe, the roar of the tractor and the clatter of harvesting machinery are common now.”

That was Wood County in 1956, fifty years ago: “The cook shack and the bunk house have made way for farm buildings: neat houses and huge barns.

Orderly machine sheds, and hundreds of another type of structure that would have mystified the 19th century pioneers who never dreamed the future held such a thing as a silo. Instead of the teams of horses and yokes of oxen that were common in the logging days, modern Wood county’s thousands of acres are grazed by sleek dairy [cattle]—animals so different from the scrubby cows first brought to the area that they can hardly be identified with the same species.

“In the early days even these nondescript milk producers were rare, and the county’s first creameries were the farms where butter was churned and then traded to the storekeeper for staples that could not be produced on the farm

“Almost 30 years were to pass after the Legislature defined the region as a county, before farmers of the area found the instrument that would make this one of the greatest dairy sections of the world – the corner cheese factory.”

Already at the time of the 1956 story, the corner cheese factory, like the saw mill, was disappearing, “but the flow of cheese, butter, ice cream, and fluid and powdered milk continues.

“The tote road and the logging trail have given way to a network of highways—ribbons of concrete and asphalt and gravel traversed by motor vehicles the first settlers could never have envisioned. The trip to the county seat that once consumed two days is now a matter of 40 minutes from the most distant point in the county.”

09-18-06

Log Cabin School

Calling it a school house would be bragging. It started with one decidedly humble home in the north woods wilderness. Some of that age were still alive to tell the tale when “The History of Northern Wisconsin” was published in 1881.

The History credits Rev. J.S. Hurlbut with starting the first local school, in a log house on the west river bank of what is now Wisconsin Rapids, in 1842 or 1843. He was its first teacher.

The Methodist missionary had arrived in the west half of Rapids, then known as Centralia, in 1842, to preach and hold meetings wherever residents would have them. During his “lonely wanderings,” according to the History, the zealous pastor was often pursued by wolves who would surround dwellings and “make night hideous with their howls, plundering whenever an opportunity offered.”

Hurlbut was officially appointed to the Wisconsin River mission, which included Rapids and Stevens Point, in 1845, at which time he founded the First Methodist Episcopal church here, the second house of worship established in this community. His labors as a missionary limited his teaching and he was succeeded as teacher in 1844 by John Warner.

In the following year, Warner opened a general store on the east side (Grand Rapids) and the school was turned over to Mrs. Searles. It was attended by eight pupils and maintained by subscriptions from those who had children in school.

Another school was opened in 1846 by Hannah Davis in a private house in Grand Rapids. “The subject of education is one of prime importance to every community, and the degree in which it is fostered and promoted is always a sure index to the intelligence and liberality of the people,” said the History.

In that spirit, a “regular” free public school was organized in 1850 in the former blacksmith shop of J.B. Hasbrouck, which had been purchased and “fitted up” for the propose. Miss L. Compton, the first teacher, was succeeded in 1854 by “Miss Powers.”

The blacksmith shop was the only school building in the city until 1861 when a new building, referred to in a previous Memoirs, was erected.

“Upon the completion of the building, the brave boys of the surrounding country were preparing for [Civil] war, and the new building was dedicated by a supper and dance, in their honor.” The first principal was “Mr. Martin.”

The following is from “actual school records” as reported by the 1923 History of Wood County.

In 1849, the school district of Grand Rapids was set off from the town of Plover, Portage County. The first annual school meeting was held in 1851 and Joseph Wood was named director. The board rented L. Kromer’s house for \$3 a month and engaged Richard Compton as teacher at \$25 a month. A blackboard was purchased for \$3.

How to pay for it all? A tax of \$183—total.

Yet, in April 1852, the school was or-

dered discontinued, apparently for lack of funds.

That year, the school district was divided. Grand Rapids, on the east bank of the river, became District 1. Centralia may have been District 2.

School District 1 purchased from Joseph and Matilda Wood its first property, a house and a half-acre block for \$450 worth of lumber and shingles. Probably to pay Wood, the annual meeting of 1853 levied a tax of \$487.07 of which 176.64 was delinquent.

William McFay was hired to teach for three months at a salary of \$85. Parents complained about McFay’s moral character and abilities but no cause for dismissal was found. The following year, Mary Powers took his place.

The school house was repaired; but at 1859’s annual meeting, it was voted to purchase a block of land for a new facility. Proposals were received from John Rablin, who wanted the town to grow north along the river and Joseph Wood “up the hill.”

Block 22 of Wood’s Addition was purchased. Before construction, the school population grew and plans enlarged to a two-department school.

District 3, south of Oak Street united with District 1 and a tax was levied. Perhaps this accounted for the name, Union School. According to Rapids historian Tom Taylor, the building was on the site of Howe School and was later moved to the fair grounds, now Witter Field, where it burned.

09-25-06

James Daly

You probably didn't know his name but if you're over 50 you knew the face of James Daly.

An obit says the Los Angeles resident died of a heart attack in Nyack, New York, July 3, 1978, en route to Connecticut where he was to open in the play, "Equus," along with his son, James Timothy Daly.

Other survivors were daughters Pegeen, Ellen Tyne (lately of "Cagney and Lacy" and "Judging Amy" television fame) and Mary Glynn; sisters Mary Ellen Daly and Cynthia Densmore; and a brother, David Daly.

James Firman Daly was born here in 1918, son of Percifer Charles and Ethelbert Hogan Daly. His grandfather was a lumberman and his father a coal dealer who died in a notorious 1935 car crash, according Mary Ellen Daly in *The Fat Memoirs*.

Hal Erickson, of "All Movie Guide," says Daly got his start by appearing in community theatre in Wisconsin Rapids. He graduated from Lincoln high school in 1936 and Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa, in 1940 or 1941.

After service in WWII, he went to New York, working his way up to Broadway in 1946. Daly spent the next few years between New York City and Wisconsin. It was in Madison that Tyne was born.

James won the Theatre Guild award in 1950 for his work in a revival of Shaw's "Major Barbara," and co-starred later that year with Helen Hayes in another revival, "The Glass Menagerie." Begin-

ning with his first film, "The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell" (1955), he became a recognizable character actor.

Daly appeared in numerous live productions in the early years of television and, during his career, in more than 600 dramatic roles. He won an Emmy for the drama special, "The Eagle and the Cage"; played in, "Give Us Barabbas"; and starred in two long-running weekly series, "Foreign Intrigue" and "Medical Center."

Among the TV programs Daly appeared in as a guest star were: Star Trek, CBS Playhouse, Mission Impossible, Gunsmoke, The Fugitive, Dr. Kildare, DuPont Show of the Week, Twilight Zone, United States Steel Hour, Studio One, Kraft Television Theatre, The Millionaire and Philco Television Playhouse.

An story, probably from the *Milwaukee Journal*, noted that Daly seemed content at his old remodeled farm house in Suffern, N.Y., growing roses, breeding sheep and swimming in the pool.

The reason he could enjoy life is that Daly had plenty of money from a "famous" cigarette contract. One month's worth of work in a year gave him the privilege of taking acting jobs he liked. The next production was to be 1961's "Give Us Barabbas."

"Several times every day I decide to give up acting and open up a store some place, preferably in Wisconsin where my roots are," Daly told the reporter.

At the time of the story, Daly's mother was said to work for the Central Intelligence Bureau in Washington and his

brother, David, for the FBI. Sister Mary Ellen Daly was by then a major in the WAFs.

Daughter Tyne Daly once said she and her family were not always secure and comfortable. "My father didn't always work," she recalls, "and we didn't always have money. When I was very young, we lived in New York near the Third Avenue El – in a six-floor walk-up."

An undated article from an entertainment magazine says Daly, the "silver-haired chief of staff" on the then-new CBS series Medical Center, didn't want to talk about himself. "It may be why he manages to be obscure and famous at the same time.

"The breadth of his career may be measured by the fact that in 1958 he signed a contract to make Camels commercials, and for seven years was flown to all points in the U.S.A. at his convenience to be filmed smoking like a chimney and assuring the entire Nation that he'd walk a mile for a Camel."

Among the topics Daly wasn't going to talk about was his marriage to Hope Newell, a "college sweetheart" and mother of their four children. The once would-be actress wouldn't talk either.

A friend was quoted as saying that, after 22 years, Hope couldn't keep her mind open and he couldn't keep his mind closed.

Jim was "with it." He wanted to be in tune with what was happening right now; she couldn't or wouldn't go along with him.

10-02-06

Palimony

It can be a happy day when a River City native receives national attention. In January 1956, a short piece in the *Daily Tribune* noted some locals had made it big.

“One of the major characters depicted in “The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell” at the Wisconsin Theatre, was Lt. Cmdr. Zachary Lansdowne, a Navy officer who perished in the 1925 wreck of the dirigible Shenandoah. Lansdowne’s first wife, who died early in the marriage, was a Rapids girl, Ellen MacKinnon. Her father, the industrialist, Falkland MacKinnon, subsequently took in Zachary and Ellen’s orphaned son, MacKinnon Lansdowne.

The movie’s subject, Billy Mitchell, had been a resident of Wisconsin, and Billy Mitchell field in Milwaukee is named for him.

Also in the *Tribune* story, Mildred Natwick, who frequently visited here with relatives—who included the cartoonist Grim Natwick. Mildred was to appear in a drama on WSAU-TV.

Cast in the part of Lt. Col. White, defense lawyer for Billy Mitchell (played by Gary Cooper), was James Daly, the homeboy who had already attained “star status” in television. This was the first of his numerous movies.

Less remembered, Daly had another round of celebrity shortly after his death July 3, 1978. Some called it “palimony.”

About that time, lawsuits had come forth, mainly in the Hollywood area,

from unmarried companions who wanted to share the fortunes of the rich and famous. Being sued were rock star Alice Cooper, actor Nick Nolte and actor Lee Marvin.

Randal G. Jones, 30, was suing in Santa Monica, Cal., for a share of the James Daly’s estate.

Daly had died the previous year at age 59, leaving an estate of at least \$1 million that his will specified go to his wife and four children. The Lee Marvin case found that people who live together can make enforceable agreements just like anyone else.

Jones was suing executors Mary E. Daly and other relatives, to whom James had willed his estate. According court records, Jones first met Daly in December 1975.

Between that time and March 1976, they “met on frequent occasions, dated, engaged in sexual activities, and, in general, acted towards one another as two people do who have discovered a love, one for the other.”

In March 1976, Jones and Daly agreed that Jones would quit his job, move into Daly’s condominium, travel with Daly and the two would “cohabit” as if they were married. During the time they lived together, the actor and model would combine their efforts and earnings and would share equally in property accumulated as a result. In addition, Daly would give Jones a monthly allowance for his personal use. The two “would hold themselves out to the public at large as cohabiting mates” and Jones would “render his services as a

lover, companion, homemaker, traveling companion, housekeeper and cook.” In order to provide these services, Jones would abandon “a material portion” of his potential career as a model.

Daly and Jones lived together until Daly’s death, after which Jones demanded half the actor’s estate as the two, according to him, had agreed. But first the court needed to determine the validity of the “cohabiters agreement.”

In making the decision, the judge referred to the previous case, “Marvin v. Marvin,” in which a woman sued a man (Lee Marvin) with whom she had been living out of wedlock. Much like Jones, she alleged that they agreed to live together as husband and wife and share in property.

The Marvin case determined that the claims for property, which was promised in exchange for sexual relations, smelled too much like prostitution, which is illegal.

Same deal with Daly and Jones.

The defendants, Daly’s heirs, charged that the agreement was unenforceable because “rendition of sexual services” was a predominant consideration for the agreement and inseparable from other services the male model rendered, such as housekeeper, traveling companion, cook, etc.

Jones v. Daly was a step down the path to the controversies over gay marriage that would become so absorbing in our time.

10-09-06

More Schools

Some districts are poor; some are selfish; and some enjoy the bliss of ignorance. Consequently, their schools suck. In many cases, communities that will not support their schools, suck from A to Z. Smart people don't want to live in stupid circumstances unless the scenery is good.

Buoyed by prosperity and the good leaders that prosperity summons, our town has usually been generous and high-minded. The school board and civic leaders knew that a by-product of education is ideas: priceless. But it soon becomes apparent that excellence is a buy-product: pricey. The bitter capitalistic truth is that money buys better administrators, teachers and buildings. According to the golden rule of supply and demand, you get what you pay for.

The stately and expensive Lincoln high school that is now East Jr. high came with a faculty that was for the most part bright, and eccentric enough to provide anecdotes for class reunions; it also boasted a world-class field house. What the "new" Lincoln we know now lacked in tradition and balconies, it made up for with a collegiate-style edge-of-town campus which itself has attained a respectable maturity; it boasts a fine fine arts performing center.

LHS principal Gus Mancuso has proven as dynamic and durable as the legendary Aaron Ritchay. The faculty is well-qualified and will probably provide amusement in 2017 for this year's graduating class.

Compared to the fiscal demands of the new millennium, education was once paper and pencil cheap. Even then, it took some effort.

A November 1920 *Daily Tribune* described the first "regular" school house. Its 1852 home in a former blacksmith shop was quickly outgrown, requiring additional space to be rented in another building.

Pupils in old "Grand Rapids" were seated on eight benches in circular form facing the teacher. Those who could write were given rear seats. If you were studying for your upcoming lesson, you had to listen to those reciting. Pupils would input text on laptop slates, a Flintstones version of portable blackboards.

Grades for the 25 students were based on daily recitations with a premium for spell-down winners, who became superstars.

In 1861, Union School was built on the present Howe elementary school grounds. It was a major improvement, providing three levels of education. Principal of the high school was M.W. Martin. Martin's wife ran the intermediate department and his daughter, the primary.

Martin was followed by J.Q. Emery and then J.A. Gaynor, namesake of Gaynor Park, now a parking lot across from the Wood County Courthouse. Under Gaynor, the first class of eight pupils was graduated.

Irving school, still standing on the east side, came in 1896; the first Lincoln high school, on the then-future site of East Jr., in 1902, all at considerable expense.

On the west side, Centralia, the first "Lowell" school was built, in 1876, for \$7,000.

Build a school and you make history. We know the name of the architect, C.D. Lemley, and the building committee: R.E. McFarland, R.C. Worthington, Fred Haertel.

T.J. Cooper, a Centralia businessman whom I otherwise would never have heard of, supervised the construction; E. LaVigne made the brick. The first principal was Charles Mead, was assisted by "Miss Shaw."

In 1920, the Lowell building was already under scrutiny by the school board, the Chamber of Commerce and other public-spirited citizens, who declared it a disgrace to the city. The same cycle happened this year with the "new" Lowell, now gone to the Afterlife.

By 1920, 24-year-old Irving School, built at a cost of \$7,200, had already been closed because classes attending the building were so small that the cost per student was too high "to successfully operate the building." The actual structure was said to be in fair condition and would probably be used again when pupils would be numerous enough; and so it happened. Though no longer a school, the building stands.

The first principal of Irving was Theo. W. Brazeau, himself a product of local schools.

Me too.

That's how I learned to think critically, use big words, eschew sentence fragments and find out about stuff like this.

10-16-06

Centralia High

They kept the referendum simple: "For High School" or "Against High School." On the first Tuesday of April 1890, voters of Centralia (now the west side of Wisconsin Rapids) marked their ballots, deciding whether a high school "be established and maintained in said city."

Centralia had an elementary school, at which the principal was resigning. Prof. C.S. Groesbeck had accepted a better-paying position with the Denver Co-operative Building and Loan Association, where his son was secretary.

In looking for a new principal, the Centralia school board decided to sweeten the contract with a two- instead of one-week vacation.

After the referendum passed "almost unanimously," the board met and "perfected" the high school organization and forwarded documents "to headquarters." Examinations were held and an inspector was sent by the State Superintendent to examine the general working condition of the school. Unfortunately, the submitted papers showed a "laxity of learning" in the various branches, and on the day of the visit, the boys were "on mischief bent."

Taken together, said the *Enterprise*, the situation "defeated the will of the people, and caused them no little disappointment and chagrin."

But "by strict discipline on the part of the teachers, and the hearty cooperation and support of the school board, order has come out of chaos, and a desire for proficiency in the various studies has

taken the place of the erstwhile fun making proclivities of the pupils. The pupils and the teachers are alike to be congratulated, and the city of Centralia may congratulate itself on its superior educational advantages."

In March of the following year, Prof. W.D. Parker, the state high school inspector, gave Centralia high a good going over and pronounced the scholarship, order and decorum satisfactory. Regarding "Centralia High School," "The above is now the official designation of our public school, and the one by which it will hereafter be known," said the *Enterprise*.

About the work of the pupils, State Superintendent Wells said, "On the whole, the papers submitted from your school indicate an orderly habit, a tidiness of detailed preparation and a grasp upon the subjects that denotes a good spirit on the part of all persons concerned, and a zeal towards the ends set for the school to accomplish that will do much toward excellent scholarship."

An invitation to the public went out in June 1891 to attend the closing exercises of the Centralia High School. However, there were no graduates, "in consequence of the transition from a graded to a high school which was affected this week."

In September 1891, both the Grand Rapids and Centralia High Schools began the fall terms "in good working order."

Prof. G.W. Paulus, principal of the Centralia High School, lasted through the 1894-95 school year and "summer school" when he left for his home

at Chilton. After a few weeks rest, he would assume charge of the Marshfield schools.

The *Enterprise* regretted that Paulus was leaving and sounded a familiar theme. "Some day in the not distant future, when the twin cities shall be united under one chamber and a common high school is established, they may be in a position to offer Professor Paulus a remuneration more nearly commensurate with his services."

In 1897, commencement exercises of Centralia High school were held at Unity church for four young men and four young ladies.

Centralia High School made it to the turn of the 20th Century, and the merger of Centralia with Grand Rapids.

Of \$16,000 levied for 1899 on both sides of the river, it was pretty obvious that "the great burden of taxation is incurred in support of the schools."

Consolidation of not only the cities but the schools would save a lot of money, "not only now but after we have become a city of great importance." Fewer employees would be required and Grand Rapids had a \$15,000 library that could be taken advantage of.

In 1902, the first Lincoln high school was built on the site of the present East Jr. high. Centralia high reverted to its status as a grade school, apparently taking the name Lowell before falling into hard times. It was replaced by the Lowell school that itself was demolished this year.

Solomon's Cousins

The deceased were descended from one of the biggest names in Wisconsin.

When Mrs. Maggie Rocheleau died at home in Grand Rapids on Nov. 8, 1897, her obituary said she was the daughter of F.X. Juneau, a cousin of Solomon Juneau, "the founder of Milwaukee."

Maggie, born in Theresa, Dodge County, in 1854, moved here with her parents. She later married O. Rocheleau and "surrendered herself" to taking care of his four children and twelve children of her own.

The founder of Theresa, Wis., was the Solomon Juneau mentioned above, said to have named that settlement after his mother. Juneau is also credited as a founder of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*.

Solomon Juneau died in 1856, his wife Josette Vieau Juneau in 1855. That they had 13-18 children helps account for many lingering relationships.

Upon Clifford Juneau's death, April 21, 1900, the obituary said he was a relative of the Crotteaus here and of the late Solomon Juneau, "founder of Milwaukee." Clifford, formerly of Rudolph, had at one time been employed in the photograph gallery of J.O. Hebert, Grand Rapids.

Clifford died at Minneapolis, the exact date not known. When taken sick, he was taken from a boarding house to a hospital where he died of Bright's disease. His effects failed to show where his former homes were, or even disclose his identity, and Mr. Juneau was buried

as "unknown."

When Elziver Thefault of Rudolph died, Feb. 8, 1906, his obituary said he, a nephew, was one of few surviving members of the Solomon Juneau family, "the founder and first mayor of Milwaukee."

Thefault, born in Canada in 1834, came to Milwaukee in 1845, moving to Theresa, and to Rudolph in 1865. He married Delia Juneau, a sister of Jasper Crotteau of this city. After her husband's death, Mrs. Juneau-Thefault moved to Park Falls to live with her son and daughter by her first husband.

When Howard Juneau, 19, Park Falls, son of Andrew Juneau, Grand Rapids, arrived in France with Wisconsin troops in 1918, the newspaper said he was a great-grandson of the first mayor of Milwaukee, Solomon Juneau.

When Joseph Gokey, 98, died March 29, 1916, at the Wood County poor farm, his obituary said he was a brother-in-law of Solomon Juneau, "founder of Milwaukee."

When Marie Husting, 83, mother of the late U.S. Senator, Paul B. Husting, died April 14, 1924, at Mayville, near Theresa, her obit said she was the only surviving daughter of Solomon Juneau, "founder of Milwaukee."

In 1954, 30 years later, when the funeral of Leo F. Husting, father of Frank Husting, Wisconsin Rapids, was held in Madison, his obituary said he was the grandson of Solomon Juneau, "founder of Milwaukee."

The 1923 *History of Wood County* told of Paul Juneau, nephew of Solomon Ju-

neau, "founder of Milwaukee." Paul was born in Theresa. His father, Narcissus, at age 70 or so, and his family, came to Rudolph in 1867 and bought the John Wells homestead in Section 17.

Paul ran the farm and worked in the woods for Clark & Scott. One of his children was Margaret, the wife of John Fritsche, whose son, Nick Fritsche, told me in 1980 that he was related to the founder of Milwaukee.

In the town of Rudolph, in 1880, Juneaus included:

Paul, 32, a farmer, his Irish wife Katharine, 35, and their children: Claphas, Mary, Joseph, Margaret, Charlotte and Angeline.

Eugene A., 45, his wife, Delia, 43, and their children: Eugene, Israel, George, Matilda, Isabel, Andrew, Elizabeth. Eugene may have been the son of Solomon Juneau.

Frank, 47, children Kate, Matilda, Stella, Ernest, Frank and Laurence.

Margaret, 68, and a daughter, Adell Juneau. And Stella Juneau.

Living with Claphaes Crotteau was Elzore Tefault, 43, and Narcese Juneau, 26.

Andrew Vieau Sr., brother-in-law of Solomon Juneau, didn't think so much of his sister's husband's rep as founder of Milwaukee. "Juneau was one of the last to recognize that Milwaukee was destined to become a permanent settlement, and had to be persuaded by his friends into taking advantage of the fact."

10-30-06

Schools 1966

Autumn of 1966, the Wisconsin Rapids school district faced big decisions.

For advice, it turned to the University of Wisconsin and the State Department of Public Instruction which recommended the building of two junior high schools and a major expansion and remodeling of Lincoln High School.

The researchers noted that the Rapids district had 4,460 students in elementary school and 1,890 in the four-year Lincoln high school that is now East Jr. High. District buildings had a capacity of 4,050 elementary students and 1,400 in high school, leaving the district 1,000 over capacity.

The 1966 study evaluated the 14 elementary school buildings for size, location, rooms, equipment, utilities, staff space and the like. In conclusion, nine schools were found acceptable.

Eight are in use 40 years later:

●Ann Mary Pitsch: Enrollment in 1966 is 213, capacity 225. According to the 1966 report, the fairly-new school is well constructed, easily expanded and suited for kindergarten through fourth grade.

●Grant: Enrollment 308, capacity 300. Sandy playground in need of paving. Classrooms in original building need redecorating, lighting, ventilation. New classrooms are excellent.

●Grove: Enrollment 431, capacity 350. Well-placed but of no more than average construction and appears "rather bleak."

●Howe: Enrollment 698, capacity 625. Site is much too small for a building with this capacity. Good quality construction, classrooms well-designed.

●Mead: Enrollment 752, capacity 625. The actual school site is too small but has access to municipally-owned recreation area. Well-designed, high quality, classrooms of good size and shape but special areas unable to accommodate present enrollment.

●Vesper: Enrollment 307, capacity 275. Location and size of site very good. Original building average, new building better. Classrooms in the old building are small but three in the new part are excellent; the gym is adequate and kitchen large and well-equipped.

●Washington: Enrollment 189, capacity 200. Large site, above average construction, modern and up-to-date.

●Woodside: Enrollment 228, capacity 200. Well designed compact unit of good quality construction. Attractive classrooms, central library, satisfactory gym, could be expanded.

The following schools are no longer in use by the Wisconsin Rapids school system though they are still standing.

●Biron: Enrollment 302, capacity 250. The location along "the highway and river" makes pedestrian student travel hazardous. Noticeable contrast between the original building and additions. Above average quality. (In 2006, in use as a private religious school.)

●Children's Choice: Enrollment 268, capacity 225. Roof and toilet problems, poorly shaped classrooms, flammable acoustical tile, substandard special ar-

eads, building could be expanded. (In 2006, temporarily closed.)

●Irving: Enrollment 122, capacity 125. Adequate site, dating to 1890s. Recently remodeled. "A neighborhood school has some advantages but the perpetuation of such small attendance centers may be questioned." (Historic building is privately-owned.)

●Lowell: Enrollment 243, capacity 245. Small playground unacceptable. All classrooms too small. No expansion should be planned for this school. (Razed in 2006.)

●Two Mile: Enrollment 138, capacity 100. "According to modern standards this building is the equivalent of a two-room school; under these circumstances it is deemed inadvisable to continue to operate this unit." (Razed in 1990.)

The following school was replaced on another site:

●Rudolph: Enrollment (1966) 261, capacity 250. Site too small and building is on side hill with rough northwest exposure, wet, muddy. The addition is better than the original. "The rest of the building does not approach modern standards." (Privately-owned and remodeled, a small part of the original school stands. "New" Rudolph school was built on the east edge of the village.)

The report and the situation that made it necessary required that decisions be made and carried out. Not only the future of the elementary schools but that of Lincoln high school itself were at stake.

11-06-06

Grim

The famed artist had been “summering” in Chillicothe, the reporter from that city’s *Constitution Tribune* said on Oct. 24, 1985.

He was Grim Natwick at the age of 95, animator of Snow White and creator of Betty Boop, “the saucy, gartered sexpot once banned from the nation’s movie screen.” The boopadoop star of short film from the 1930s had enjoyed a “popularity rebirth” with the generation of the 1980s.

Natwick, who would soon be wintering in California, continued throughout his life (1890-1990) to visit his home town, Wisconsin Rapids.

When the Chillicothe newspaper interviewed him, he was writing for a cartoon magazine and had several projects going in his home studio, including a composite of masks he had already drawn. “I’m doing what Michelangelo would have done if he had had Xerox,”

Natwick said.

Some of the faces dated back to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied for three years. Natwick, for the first year, was allowed only to draw portraits.

Natwick told the *Constitution Tribune* that he was of Norwegian descent, born in the “lumber area” of Wisconsin. “Grim” was a nickname for Myron though, as a boy in Wisconsin Rapids, he was often called, “Wild Bill” and his brother, “Buffalo Bill,” courtesy of a local blacksmith who liked youngsters. “Buffalo Bill” was shortened to “Buff” which his brother continued to use. But “Wild Bill” became “Grim” in a process not described in the story.

When Grim decided he’d like a career as an illustrator, his father had “faith and \$1,000” to put to the task. Natwick enrolled at Chicago Art Institute and worked as a commercial artist on the side, learning a lot about lettering and filling in letters.

Then he “fell into” illustrating covers for “songs,” apparently referring to what is known as “sheet music.” His first was “for a kid from my home town who asked me to do a cover for a song he wrote. The song didn’t do much but one day I showed the cover to a song publisher in Chicago and asked him if he could use one to do covers for him; he looked at the cover and said, ‘Sure.’”

Natwick counted over 300 covers that he had done. He said he had an autographed photo of W.C. Handy of “St. Louis Blues” fame. “I did all his covers.”

Natwick also illustrated magazines, studied at the National Academy of Design in New York and got into animation in New York.

11-20-06

Ike

Like us, the aging populations of the 1950s threatened the good life of the American consumer by the sheer corpulence of their numbers. According to a 1956 *Tribune*, one in ten Americans then was over 65, compared with one in 25 as it had been in 1900.

Now, it's more like one in six.

The other 1956 statistic of interest was that the number of folks 65 and over who were employed had dropped from 63 per cent in 1900 to 24 per cent—despite the assumption that they wanted to work.

One reason given was that so many had moved from farms, where retirement was gradual, to what we call the Grand Mall, where older workers were losing out to younger workers or were hit by arbitrary retirement regulations. By one estimate, 40 per cent of the males over 65 actively sought further employment in 1956 but couldn't get it.

The *Tribune* worried that the pittance offered by the government could not offer economic security. "A much better answer would be to keep these folk working longer in gainful jobs. The benefit to them is obvious. The public and private cost of pension programs will be much less."

Furthermore, just like now, economists forecast a manpower shortage, then due to the depression of the 1930s rather than to the birth control pill. In order to employ gung ho graybeards, some companies, said the June 19,

1956, *Tribune*, were actually boosting the retirement age and teaching how to adjust to new situations.

"We need a great deal more of this. Our older people are a great reservoir of skill and experience. To throw it away is wasteful and costly both for them and for the country. It will become more so as time goes on." That was before the consultants of the Grand Mall learned that older workers should be retired because younger workers and illegal aliens cost much less.

One of those aging Americans suffered a heart attack in 1955 and could have, maybe should have, retired. It was President Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower, who was 64. Asked about laying down his arms, the old general said, "I'm saving that rocker for the day when I feel as old as I really am."

Though he opted to run for a second term of hard labor as President, Ike also liked to play.

According to one account, a White House visitor noticed the President was wearing leather bandages on his left wrist. When Ike explained that he had a mild arthritic condition there, the visitor said he was glad it wasn't serious. "I should say it is serious!" exclaimed Ike indignantly. "It means that I can't play golf!"

In January 1956, Eisenhower joined his Secretary of the Treasury, George M. Humphrey, on Humphrey's big Georgia estate. Within minutes after arriving, the President and Humphrey changed to hunting togs and were off to the fields aboard a "roadster" drawn by

two white mules. Behind was another hunting roadster carrying bird dogs and some of the "Negro" beaters whose job it was to flush the quail. Although they rode around the estate for two hours, the big-shots sighted birds only twice and failed to bring one down

When Eisenhower had his heart attack in January, Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, then Democratic floor leader, commented from his ranch in Texas, where he was convalescing from his own heart attack in preparation to getting back to work. "As a fellow human being who has gone through the same thing, I am very pleased that the medical report is so favorable. I know every American will be happy."

Johnson followed a pattern similar to Eisenhower's and himself went on to become the U.S. President who decided not to seek a second term because of the unpopularity of the Viet Nam war.

Eisenhower, born Oct. 14, 1890, died March 28, 1969. Though he made his living as a General, he, in our hawkish times, sounds like a dove when he declares: "Every gun that is fired, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

"The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children."

11-27-06

Rudolph School

None knew if there would continue to be a public school operating in the village or town of Rudolph.

When the Wisconsin Rapids Board of Education in late 1970 hired an architect to study the situation, it was assumed that the elementary school would be closed, and the pupils would be sent to the pedagogical den of iniquity that those from “the Point” call “the Rapids.”

The high school portion of Rudolph’s school population had suffered that fate in 1962, when the district was “consolidated” into that of their larger neighbor. One-room schools in the district were eliminated in 1964. The last to operate here were Spring Lake, Pleasant View and Lone Birch, a stone’s throw from my town of Rudolph residence. Pupils from those schools were transferred to Vesper or Rudolph schools.

The *Tribune* found it “interesting” that a Rudolph school should be up for consolidation because the first big Rudolph school in 1915, had “consolidated” the old Clark & Scott school, a mile west of the village, which was sold to become a house.

A 1961 addition to the 1915 Rudolph version was attached just prior to annexation by Wisconsin Rapids School District, perhaps as a poison pill. A decade later, inspectors found in the deteriorating older structure smoke and safety hazards, a basement that was

a haphazard labyrinth of duct work, a noise problem on the second floor, and “dismal” toilet rooms. When physical education classes took showers before lunch, the kitchen ran out of water.

More than 800 Rudolph-area residents signed a petition, asking that the elementary school stay in the village. Spokesman Joseph Raubal noted a municipal sewer system being installed and plans for water service.

Just before Christmas 1971, the “Rudolph School Association for Better Education” offered the Wisconsin Rapids School Board what the *Tribune* called a “Yule gift with strings attached.” Raubal, the group’s president, brought a check for \$5,000, the proceeds of the previous summer’s “county western day,” to be used for remodeling or replacing Rudolph Elementary School.

Raubal called the check a Christmas gift from the people of Rudolph to the taxpayers of the district. He said the group planned another country-western day the following July. But the check was unsigned, to be completed only when the board decided to use the money in Rudolph.

Donald Rehfeldt, Rapids board president, noted that the decision was yet to be made. In spite of reservations about the gift, board members expressed gratitude to Rudolph residents for their efforts.

Indeed, Raubal noted that hundreds of residents put in many hours of work on the fund drive, probably a unique effort in the district’s history, he suggested “It’s nice to see a smile,” on the

faces of the Rudolph contingent, Ben Hanneman of Grand Rapids said, alluding to earlier, sometimes less-than-cordial discussions as Rudolph residents argued to retain their school.

Alternatives for Rudolph seen in the early 1970s were: do as little as possible until the state closed the school; tear down the old section of the school and build new school rooms; or begin plans for a new school at a different site, possibly on one owned by the district on Reddin Road.

In September 1973, the Wisconsin Rapids district school board brought a collective sigh of relief to its northern neighbors when it agreed to build a new elementary school on a new site in Rudolph by 1975. According to a Nov. 24, 1973, *Daily Tribune*, the board had decided it would be unwise to attempt to revive the old building.

“Rudolph probably has the most serious problems of any elementary school in the district. But the tenacity of Rudolph residents has also been a big factor in inclusions of a new school in the current building program.”

Plans were presented by Rapids architect Donn Hougen for a new school on a 20-acre site along County Trunk C east of the existing school, at a cost of \$1 million. The result was the over-30 but still smart-looking temple of learning, appropriately sited on Knowledge Avenue, where all the children are above average—in Rudolph, Wis., U.S.A., where the same can be said for the cheese.

12-04-06

St. Vincent de Paul

St. Vincent was a nun. My usually reliable wife told me that her 6th grade teacher at St. Joseph's Catholic school, Oconto, Wis., was Sister Vincent de Paul, and was referred to as "V-D-P." A popular singing nun of Seventies vintage, Sister Vincent was known to lead the class through "Blowing in the Wind."

St. Vincent is also a parish.

2006 will not pass without commemorating here an event of fifty years ago that reflected the growth and movement of this city's population to the southeast—and strong support for Catholic education.

Named in honor of a French saint of Christian charity, the newly-established parish of St. Vincent de Paul would serve the area south of East Grand Avenue, including the townships of Grand Rapids and Saratoga where most baby bulge development was taking place.

The announcement was made by a name familiar to Catholics of the Fifties, the Rev James P. Finucan, secretary to the most active and Most Rev. John P. Treacy, Bishop of La Crosse, at a meeting at the hall of the Rapids mother church, SS. Peter & Paul. Finucan also revealed that the Rev. Carl J. Dockendorff, then assistant at "SS.," would be the first pastor of the new parish.

"Father Dockendorff."

According to a locally-published 2003 Catholic newsletter, the La Crosse native was a graduate of Aquinas high school,

La Crosse; Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa; and St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore. Following ordination in 1945, Dockendorff assisted at St. Mary's in Wausau, 1945-50, and at SS. Peter & Paul, here, 1950-55. While at SSPP, he devoted much energy to the founding of Assumption high school.

In the 2003 newsletter, Assumption English teacher Kath Cavanaugh related how Dockendorff, as a young pastor in the early 1950s, had gone "door to door to every parishioner" asking for contributions to the proposed Catholic high school.

As founding pastor of St. Vincent, Dockendorff oversaw the building of the parish church school and convent, which were dedicated Oct. 20, 1957. In 1980-81, the buildings were expanded to include a gymnasium and auditorium.

According to a 1956 *Daily Tribune*, the parish was expected to number from 300-400 families.

At that time, local Catholic schools were unable to handle the multitudinous grade-school-age children of church members. Overflow classes occupied rooms at Assumption high school and in church sacristies. Several hundred children were unable to attend Catholic school at all.

SSPP would continue to serve the area north of East Grand Avenue and east of the river. St. Lawrence and Our Lady Queen of Heaven, commonly called "St. Mary's," would continue on the West Side.

The St. Vincent de Paul complex was to be built on property owned by the

La Crosse Diocese between 12th and 13th streets, south of Chestnut Street. A grade school would be first, for which Carl J. Billmeyer of Rapids was chosen as architect. Plans called for an auditorium that would be used temporarily for church services.

St. Vincent school, with a capacity for 700, opened in 1957 with Dockendorff at the helm, where he stayed until his retirement in 1991. He continued to assist until health problems intervened at the end of the 20th Century.

When Dockendorff died, Oct. 19, 2003, the mass was held at his spiritual home of many years, St. Vincent de Paul.

Parish namesake Vincent de Paul (1580-1660), a French peasants' son become priest, was on a vocational career track to Easy Street; but when he embarked by sea to pick up an inheritance, Turkish pirates attacked his vessel. Vincent received an arrow wound, was captured, sold as a slave and escaped.

It has been said that he was, in turn: traveling on a secret mission to Henry IV; employed by a certain Queen Marguerite; and acting as a spiritual director for a wealthy Mademoiselle.

When a change of heart led him to devote much of his life to helping the poor, de Paul turned his attention to assisting and converting peasants and convicts and founding hospitals, orphanages and other charitable organizations.

Vincent de Paul was canonized as a saint in 1737.

12-11-06

Miss Ann Pitsch

1970 she placed an ad in the *Daily Tribune*.

"To all my former fellow-teachers, students and other friends, I want to say A Very Merry and Blessed Christmas and a Happy Joyous New Year. And I wish to thank all of you, including The Daily Tribune who have taken the time to write me, send me cards or otherwise have been so kind and thoughtful of me since my retirement; and especially since my residence at the Bloomer Memorial hospital, Extended Care Unit, Bloomer, Wis."

Maybe the thoughtfulness of Ann Mary Pitsch is why she got a school named after her. A few clues to her life from old newspaper items:

In October 1925, the local historical and literary club met at the home of Mrs. G.L. Heilman. After members' favorite recipes, "Miss Ann Pitsch" presented the study topic, "Novels Dealing with Social Responsibility." Following her review of "Women Professional Workers," and "Working with the Working Women," "a dainty lunch was served."

1938, on Highway 54, four miles east of Rapids, an automobile driven by Ina Iverson stopped and was struck from behind by another auto. Shaken and bruised were the Misses Iverson, Ann Mary Pitsch, Inez Morrow and Helen Terrio, all teachers in local schools.

1958, a new East Side elementary school for 380 pupils was proposed by the Board of Education. Said Bernard Shearier: "Our experience in building schools hasn't been very good. The plaster is hardly dry in a new building before it is bulging at the seams with capacity enrollment."

The new school would be located on a city-owned site bounded by 17th, 19th, Plum and Pear streets. Superintendent R.E. Clausen argued to a reluctant city council that it was needed because of the overcrowding at Howe School.

The board was preoccupied with the Lincoln High School problem. LHS required another expansion (a vocational addition was new in 1958) and the West Side elementary system also would have to be expanded.

By June 1959, the name, "Ann Mary Pitsch Elementary School, was chosen, "in honor of a dedicated teacher who retired last week after 39 years in the city's education system." At the time of her retirement, Miss Pitsch was the mathematics instructor in the upper grades at Howe school.

A June 1959 *Daily Tribune* editorial approved the "well-merited recognition to a teacher who rendered devoted and exceptionally able service in the city's school system." Hundreds of Miss Pitsch's former students would applaud the board's actions."

Miss Pitsch was not an "easy" teacher. "She earned the esteem of her pupils by setting high standards of achievement, by challenging them to

give the best that was in them, and by providing expert guidance in their quest for knowledge through her exceptional talents as an instructor. Her sincerity of purpose and unwavering sense of duty provide a shining example for all who were privileged to know her.

"The naming of the new school in her honor will come as a pleasant surprise to Miss Pitsch, who retired from teaching only last week after serving here since 1920. We trust she will interpret it as a lasting token of community appreciation for her work."

Designed by Gene A. Rowland and build by general contractor L.A. Bauer of Nekoosa, nine-room Pitsch school was ready for the 1959-60 term. It would accommodate kindergarten through fourth grade pupils residing in the southeastern section of the city.

Back in January 1932, at a "Presto" benefit card party at the home of Mrs. Jere Witter, Misses Ann Mary Pitsch and Lucy Keeler reported on the life and works of John Masefield, the poet laureate of England.

What did Miss Ann think of Masefield's "Sea Fever"?

*I must go down to the seas again,
to vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way,
where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask if a merry yarn
from a laughing fellow rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream
when the long trick's over."*

12-18-06

Chequamegon Christmas

Sunrise of Christmas day, 1956, came late. Hours had already passed since my 11-year-old self had been allowed to get up from a nearly-sleepless bed and find my way to the tree, where holiday-wrapped gifts waited in the moonlight. Could bleary-eyed parents deny it was the most wonderful time of the year?

To tell the impolite and unoriginal truth: were it not for the big party we have attached to it, this could easily be the worst time of year. For our predecessors in the northern hemisphere, the package we call the holiday season had to include a few bundles of icy despair. This is the time of year surrounding the winter solstice, when the sun, from which all blessings flow, almost disappears into the southern horizon.

So if you're the calendar maker and have a big holiday ready to be put into action, why not schedule it for the season that needs it most? Taking that initiative were the nature-loving heathens: druids, mummers, Mithrans, pantheists, Platonists, polytheists, Saturnalians, shamanists, Sons of Isis, wiccans, what-nots and the Wassail bunch out by Amherst Junction.

Christians, personified by the first Pope Julius, scheduled their winter fest with reference to the same principle. It is no more than an urban legend that Jesus was born on the 25th day of "December."

Sometime in the fourth century, the date for the birthday party of the child Christ was settled on. Happily for the great unwashed masses, it coincided with earth-bound rituals that beseeched the rebirth of the nearly-invisible "Invincible Sun."

For a while, our Puritan cousins in England and New England fought the bad practices brought to Christmas by Germans and their ilk, such as overindulgence, intoxication, osculation and lederhosen. But the sanctimonious were soon overwhelmed by what an ignorant observer might consider our religion: shopping.

For no good reason, on a midwinter eve recently, I took a drive and found myself on the far side of the Chequamegon National Forest.

Though it didn't seem so at that exotic moment, my route circumnavigated familiar territory. Many times, during Christmas week, I had spent a night or two with my blood brothers, Dunlap and Hebert, by a campfire at the Chequamegon's Mondeaux flowage.

A century earlier, my own grandfather had built a cabin in Taylor county at Jump River, north of state highways 73 and 64 on which I was traveling. For those early Christmases, Philip and family had lighted their fire, said their prayers and maybe hung up stockings, in a simple one-room cabin.

My 2006 pilgrimage took me west of Owen-Withee and north of Thorp into a vast and moonless night that still

didn't look so civilized. It was easy to remember that the wolves and bears my grandma feared were coming back like bad pennies.

Miles into the blessed nowhere, I came upon, somewhat abruptly, a startling vision: the village of Gilman, Wis. The couple blocks of wide Midwestern main street were lit up to resemble noon. The evening gathering seemed to be centered on the bar of the Gilman Bowl, where citizens congregated, awash in even more light, assuming postures the ignorant might term devout. I didn't need to look for a better example of how to deal with the solstice.

From Gilman, I returned home via Medford and state highway 13, bringing to mind the sunset of the day that began this memoir, that of Christmas 1956. As always, we had traveled to "Grandma & Grandpa's" and it was amiably dark for the two-hour ride back to Rapids.

As our 1949 Pontiac cruised through the countryside, off to the side, I watched the glow of small windows and I knew that, even as we flew by, farmers went about evening chores, as they did every morning and evening. Along the road home, it was good to see a light in the barn on Christmas night.

12-25-06

Jukebox Saturday Night

As 1956 shaded into 1957, the background of what was then Wisconsin Rapids' newest industry, Benbow Foundries, Inc., was provided to the *Daily Tribune* by foundry president, David Benbow.

"Benbow Foundries was only a dream until July of 1955," explained its founder and namesake. "We had traveled over Ohio, Indiana and parts of Illinois and Wisconsin looking for a location. We preferred a small, progressive community with a suitable building. In July, while stopping off at Wisconsin Rapids, we were told of the Wood County highway garage building being for sale. We immediately started wheels in motion to buy the property."

The foundry at 330 9th Ave. S. had been in production since June 1956. It employed 31.

Also new for 1956 was an East Side swimming pool that has only recently been removed and filled in. Two years earlier, the original pool, on the same site, which utilized river water from above the dam, had been condemned because of safety and sanitation problems. The 1956 pool had been built with public funds and support from Consolidated Civic Foundation.

To be built in 1957: Approved and in planning stage was a state office building, "a fitting climax to a great year of progress for our community," according to the *Daily Tribune*. "The community's cup of holiday cheer, already brimming from other good news of recent days, is

filled to overflowing by this decision"

Moving the office would have resulted in displacement of nearly 100 employees operating here in rented quarters. "What this means to our economy is plainly evident. It means added population, added payrolls, greater purchasing power, more people to share in our civic, social and religious endeavors which are so much a part of a community's strength."

The chosen site was "Tourist Park," a city-owned campground along the Wisconsin river to the south, whereas the locations at Stevens Point were all privately owned and not necessarily available. "We would be less than candid," said the *Tribune*, "if we did not concede that political pressures may have had a part in winning a decision favorable to Wisconsin Rapids."

Also new at the end of 1956 was the Rapids Zephyr Services gas station at the corner of East Grand Avenue and 6th Street: "More Zip...more Zoom with Zephyr Power-Pak gasoline." Managed by Jack Gill, it became a minor hangout for the worst generation.

Demolished in 1956 was the Wood County Grocery Co. building on the West Side market square. The wholesale grocery firm had purchased the former potato warehouse building 35 years previous and added two top floors. The site in 1956 belonged to the city and would expand the Market Square parking lot.

Gone by New Years 1957 was the First English Lutheran church at 4th Avenue and Roosevelt Street, the property purchased by Consolidated Water Power

& Paper Co. The 1920 building was replaced by a new church at 510 Garfield Street, dedicated October 1956.

Gone but not forgotten: The Skyway Ballroom at 1st Street and Airport Avenue, burned Dec. 13, 1956. The large Quonset-style structure as pictured was way homelier than I would have guessed.

Lyle Nabbefeldt, operator of the establishment, who lived in a trailer house ten feet north of the ballroom, discovered the blaze about 3 a.m. Nabbefeldt said he attempted to fight the flames with available fire extinguishers but called the city fire department at 3:20, bringing one truck to the scene. Thirteen minutes later, asst. Chief Clarence Cheatle requested another truck and crew.

The fire started at the east end of the building and consumed the hardwood dance floor until it reached the stage and bandstand at the west end. While the blaze was at its hottest, firemen played hoses on the house trailer to keep it from igniting.

The flavor of Skyway was illustrated in a 1949 ad for a St. Patrick's Day Dance on a Thursday night with music by Vic's Little Band, followed by Friday and Sunday roller skating and juke box dancing Saturday night.

Some time later, shortly after the fire, I rode my bicycle over to suck up an image that I would use half-a-century later: tumbled into a hole in the ground, the charred wreckage of good times come to a sudden end.

01-01-07

Frontier Days

First “white man” to arrive here? Probably a French-Canadian explorer. First to set up a business? And when was a town settled and who were the pioneers?

The *Grand Rapids Tribune* of Sept. 23, 1914, provided answers that have become our history and are repeated to each generation like a tribal mass.

In the winter of 1827, before Wisconsin became a territory, Daniel Whitney of Green Bay obtained a permit from the Winnebago residents (now Ho Chunk) to make wooden shingles on the Wisconsin River. He hired his nephew, David R. Whitney to superintend the mill at the mouth of the Yellow river (now under Castle Rock flowage).

Due to a perceived infraction, the output of the mill was confiscated by the U.S. government and the shingles and timber taken to build Fort Winnebago at Portage, Wis.

In 1831, Whitney received another permit, this time to cut timber and erect a sawmill at Nekoosa, where navigable waters ended and the series of rapids that are now dominated by paper mills began. The Whitney mill was built by David R. Whitney, A.B. Sampson and Robert Wakely. It was the first on the Wisconsin river.

In 1836, Wisconsin was designated a territory of the U.S. and a strip of land along the river opened to settlement.

The first to settle and build anything permanent at the “Grand Rapids” that became Wisconsin Rapids was Nelson

Strong, who testified he came up the Wisconsin in a canoe on a prospecting trip and decided he would make this his home. Whitney and A.B. Sampson were already running a sawmill “above the city,” at Whitney’s Rapids, according to the 1914 account— although “Whitney’s Rapids” usually refers to Nekoosa, which would be “below the city.”

Strong bought out the Sampson interest and with another “prospector” went into the mill business. In 1840, Sampson moved his family to Grand Rapids. In 1842, Henry Sampson was born, credited as the first white child born in what would become Wood County. Robert and Mary Wakely’s son, Otis, was also born about this time. Both Otis and Henry Sampson were still “hale and hearty” at the time of the 1914 *Tribune* story,

With the building of the mill came the influx of settlers and consequent “firsts.”

1842, the first village blacksmith, in the person of J.B. Hasbrouck. The same year, Ira Purdy, a mill builder from Wayne, Pa., who was still living in 1914 as was Lemuel Kromer, who arrived in 1845 as one of the first merchants.

A great number of the settlers at that time were Canadian French river men. Daniel Whitney had brought some of them under contract from Canada. They arrived here by traveling from Green Bay to Portage and back up the Wisconsin, the way most of the supplies from the outside were brought in. Among the French names were Closuit, Arpin, Corriveau, Pepin, Pomainville, Biron, Landry, Cotey, LaBreche, Denis, La Vigne,

Marceau, Carden, Leroux, Le May, and Lyonnais.

Life was somewhat rough and many stories are told about Rev. Hurlburt, the first preacher in Wood county to make the river men see the light. Services were held in an old building that had occupied what in 1914 was the site of the First National Bank.

Perhaps unfortunately, the building was partitioned into rooms used for conflicting purposes. While church was being held in one room, another was being used “as a boudoir by the Canucks and the amens often mingled with the voluptuous snores of the sleeping man and many times the preacher who was a big man would go to another part of the building to stop the fight which was the inevitable result of a game of High, Low, Jack and the Game.”

Rev. Hurlbut, according to the account, often dragged three or four of the miscreants by the neck and made them sit through the service, much to their disgust.

The main product sold by local “grocery stores” was apple jack and squirrel whiskey. When log runs started in the spring and the lumber jacks came to town, the timid inhabitants, “who were mighty few by the way,” would take to their cyclone cellars, while the hardy majority would get out and help paint the town red.

“There was a time when Grand Rapids was called the toughest town on the river,” said the *Tribune*. “But that was long ago.”

01-08-07

Whigs

Bob Wakely a Whig? And a politician! The Point Basse innkeeper has been seen as a roisterer, perhaps a bounder, at least a raconteur. Certainly, he built a tavern south of Nekoosa and helped with mill building and general commerce in the vicinity. Some of his family helped populate this area while some moved on west.

A “Whig District Convention” in Fond du Lac, Wis., was reported by the *Wisconsin Republican* newspaper and reprinted in the *Madison Express* of June 28, 1845. Unanimously nominated were Stoddard Judd of Brown County, George H. Smith of Sheboygan County and Robert Wakely of Portage County, all candidates for the next House of Representatives. “This is an excellent ticket in every respect, as even our democratic friends admit,” said the *Express*.

Wisconsin in 1845 was a territory and would apply for statehood in 1847.

Like so many of our early settlers, the three candidates, Judd, Smith and Wakely, had come from upstate New York and represented for the moment the progress-oriented citizens of the civilization growing out of the Pinery.

About Wakely, the editors were vague. They said they didn’t know him personally but that gentlemen of both parties who knew him better had described the central Wisconsin entrepreneur as a man of unimpeachable moral character and undoubted talent. The resident of “Point Boss, in the heart of the great Pinery region,” then resided in Portage County,

because Wood County had not been created. He was opposed by Abraham Brawley, the Opposition candidate.

According to the Madison newspaper, “This Brawley, in his usual classic language, recently said, ‘Wakely is the most *populous* man in this Pinery: he’s more *populous* than myself.’”

“From all that we can ascertain, Mr. Wakely will receive a heavy vote in the district, and a large majority in the Pinery. His moral character, his winning yet unobtrusive manners, and his intelligence and talents, when placed in juxtaposition with the character and acquirements of his opponent, Abraham Brawley, invest him with such a decided superiority in every respect, that we cannot doubt the decision of the ballot-box.

“Like Dr. Judd, Robert Wakely is a thorough but not an ultra Whig. We hail his nomination as the precursor of a brighter day for the people of Northern Wisconsin.”

The Whig Party was formed to oppose the policies of President Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party. It tended to support Congress over the Executive and favored modernization and economic development. The name was chosen to echo the Whigs who had fought for independence in the 1770s. Prominent later leaders were Daniel Webster, William Henry Harrison, Henry Clay, Zachary Taylor, Winfield Scott, John Tyler, Millard Fillmore and Abraham Lincoln.

Another reference to Wakely came in a March 9, 1852, *Madison Daily Democrat*, which reported a bill by Mr. (George?) Cate, granting to Wakely the

right to run a ferry across the Wisconsin River (south of the present Nekoosa bridge).

A feature on Orrin Maybee in the *Stevens Point Journal*, Jan. 3, 1891, also relates to Wakely. Maybee, also from New York state, assisted Wakely’s political opponent, Abraham Brawley, in erecting the first sawmill in what was to become the reduced Portage county.

Maybee was at Portage city when there were no buildings except the fort and was personally acquainted with Jefferson Davis and General Taylor. About 1846, the soldiers left for the Mexican war and never returned to the Portage battlements.

In the early years, Maybee was employed by Point namesake George W. Stevens to construct a canoe at the foot of Conant Rapids. The canoe was hauled to the head of the rapids where Stevens Point “now stands” and where Maybee had helped Stevens erect the first log shanty to hold his goods which were then reshipped in said canoe to Big Bull Falls (Wausau).

Maybee’s first trip down the river on lumber was for David Hill in 1840 from Grand Rapids to St. Louis. On his return trip, he helped pole two canoes from Galena, Ill., to Portage and Point Basse, where he helped Robert Wakely erect his house, the first in that vicinity.

01-15-07

Children's Choice

Before it crumbled into dust, the clipping told its story one last time: about the dedication of a new Children's Choice school on "County W," east of Wisconsin Rapids. The *Daily Tribune* story was dated, as well as could be determined, January 6, 1950. First classes would begin the following Monday, following Christmas vacation.

Taking part in the dedication ceremony were:

- Mr. or Mrs. Corey (the first name had been lost), both former Wood County superintendents of schools.

- Rev. A.W. Triggs, pastor of Port Edwards Community church.

- A Biron Girl Scout troop.

- Mrs. Ralph Turner, director of the district school board, Theodore Welton, board clerk, D.M. De Rouchey, treasurer, Ben Hanneman, town chairman of Grand Rapids and Matt Knedle, county school superintendent.

- A cornet trio made up of Fred Schaffer, Dave Denniston and William Nobles.

- Linda Kortkamp and Marylyn Petta, pupils of the new school, to help lay the cornerstone.

For the 134 enrolled, architect Donn Hougen had included six classrooms, a principal's office, teachers' lounge, kitchen and gymnasium. The building was constructed of cinder block with an outer facing of cream-colored brick.

During the U.S. Bicentennial, an Aug. 21, 1976, *Tribune* story by Esther Staeck

told of a small District 3 school on the south side of the Four Mile Creek in 1870, serving German immigrant farmers with large families. Consequently, District 4 was created. In 1890, land was purchased from John Glebke for \$17.50 at what is now Highway W and 48th Street.

Henry Glebke, John Rasmussen and Fred Rickoff were school board members in 1910 and Bessie La Vigne the teacher. La Vigne described a white frame building with a wide porch across the front. A photo shows an attractive open porch on the old school, while another photo, after remodeling, shows the then homely but functional enclosed porch.

Running the wood stove was usually a problem for the teachers. During one class, an explosion blew ashes out the front and Wilbur Krueger, leaped over the back of the seat "like a deer." A bullet in a chunk of wood was the suspected cause. Near the stove was big wood box. When emptied, it yielded old bread crusts, apple cores, stocking caps and mouse nests.

Teacher La Vigne said she walked from Oak Street, occasionally catching a ride with Mr. Timm or Mr. Goldberg on their way to make hay on the marshes. Evenings, she sometimes rode a beer wagon. She loved the magnificent horses but was embarrassed on Oak Street to be helped down off the high seat.

Like almost every country school, her scholastic venue had: a pump, iron stove, slate blackboards and a long recitation bench. "Programs" that used a makeshift

stage of rough boards and canvas, plank seats for the audience. A Christmas tree with paper chains, popcorn strings and paper figures. Picnics (Clara Helke's cake covered with orange slices).

And there were those visits from the county superintendent and his assistant, Miss McDermid, always feared.

The school was called District No. 4 until 1917 when George Varney, superintendent, thought all schools should have names.

District 4's parent organization, the Jolly Hour Club, asked each member to submit a possibility. Mrs. Gilbert Moll, apparently the former Jessine Rasmussen, submitted "Children's Choice School," which she said, "belonged to history."

"Choice" grew with the times. A basement was put under the old school so it could have a furnace, running water, indoor toilets and playground equipment. In 1945, through the federal hot lunch program, the storeroom was converted into a kitchen. In June 1949, construction began on the building now vacant. But the babies were bulging at such a rate that, by 1956, crowded conditions were already a problem.

District No. 4 school, said the *Tribune*, grew from a one-room frame building for 20 children, to a school with seven classrooms, a library, a multi-purpose room, a large gym, a kitchen and accommodations for over 250 children. It was a bricks-and-mortar conglomeration in the end as fragile as the clipping that told its story.

01-22-07

Big Frogs

As a peeper in a small pond, I usually write about other small frogs. But, looking back to the beginning of our pond here, some of the frogs were at least medium-sized.

One of the first to arrive here was larger-than-average Robert Wakely, the Whig I wrote about recently.

About twenty years after Wakely hopped ashore, a story in the Feb. 10, 1858, "Central Wisconsin" (a Wausau newspaper), told, with progress-initiative turns of phrase, about the imminent rise of Wakely's Wisconsin home, "Nekoosa." "The rapidity with which towns and villages are springing up in the valley of the Wisconsin, and along its banks, exceeds the expectation of the most sanguine."

Twenty years previous, the region had been "all wild with the exception of a few lumbermen's shanties. Now many fine villages have taken place, and others are fast appearing."

The *Central Wisconsin* predicted that Nekoosa would soon rank first, in business and population, of all the settlements on the river above the city of Portage. Nekoosa would become a very big pond, if the big frogs had their way. "The point, Whitney Rapids—Point Basse, is a fine one; and from the known energy of character, and forecaste [sic] of the parties engaged in this enterprise, we are prepared to believe all that is predicted of it."

The big frogs had incorporated a Stock Company with a capital stated at

\$500,000, a croaking huge sum in those days. They proposed to erect one of the largest lumbering establishments "in all the West." Saw mills, booms to control the flow of the product and dams "of the most substantial and permanent character" would be constructed.

Even "in the wildest stage of water," said the writer, "so that if every boom and dam above them, sho'd be swept away at the same time, they should be brought up and the property preserved at Nekoosa."

The mills would be capable of sawing an immense amount of lumber, "and so arranged as to be capable of an indefinite increase."

The great advantages of Nekoosa, as a point for manufacturing pine lumber, the writer said, "have been long known and appreciated by all who were acquainted with that business as prosecuted on the Wisconsin River."

The first mill had been erected at Nekoosa by the amphibious Daniel Whitney, of Green Bay, nearly twenty five years before, while the land was still owned by the native inhabitants. Whitney had a lease from the United States Government, reputedly with the consent of the tribe occupying the country. His continued for many years to be the only mill at which lumber was manufactured here.

The biggest charm of Nekoosa was that it occupied the rapids furthest downstream on the Wisconsin river, with all the timber above, waiting to be floated down. Logs would be converted to lumber and shingles and rafted to Dubuque or St. Louis, "almost in market, com-

pared with that made above."

Further, it was believed that steamboats would service Nekoosa from places like Kilbourn City, now Wisconsin Dells, "where the La Crosse R.R. crosses the river."

"All in all, it is one of the most prominent sites on the river for Hydraulics, and for building up a town. It is in right hands, and will soon be a place of note on this river."

Another newspaper, the *Wisconsin Pinery* of Feb. 19, 1858, contains a notice from the Nekoosa Lumbering Company for a stockholders meeting at the American Hotel, Milwaukee.

Four frogs of various sizes assembled: Orlando Curtis, a resident of Stevens Point, Wis., president of the firm, and three directors of the board:

George W. Strong.

Albert G. Ellis, early settler, historian and publisher, a pretty big frog.

Moses M. Strong. Born in Vermont, he moved to Mineral Point, Wis., as a politician, lawyer, real estate investor, railroad promoter and lumber mill developer. Like a lot of his peers, he founded something: Arena, Wis.

An 1858 railroad scandal ended Strong's political career after which he organized the Wisconsin bar association (for lawyers). He also composed a history of Wisconsin Territory.

Write your own book. That's how to get the rest of the pond to remember what a big frog you are.

01-29-07

Eisenhower Doctrine

Opening the *Daily Tribune* any time after 1948 could reveal a headline about the mess in the “Mideast.”

The story could include an American President’s efforts to counter anti-American fanatics infiltrating and attempting to alienate oil-rich “allies.”

In his State of the Union message of January 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower revealed his plan for a more aggressive foreign policy, the “Eisenhower Doctrine.” The objective was not to push democracy but to deter, through military might and economic aid, armed aggression by Soviet Russian communists.

According to an editor’s note January 16 for William L. Ryan’s *Daily Tribune* column, “The cradle of civilization can become its grave if misjudgment in the Middle East sets off World War III.”

Ryan, Associated Press foreign analyst, said the worst enemies of the United States in the Middle East were ignorance, fear, corruption and poverty. “It will take more than a declaration against armed aggression to defeat these allies of communism.”

The Eisenhower Doctrine, he said, indicated an American realization that the last chance in the Middle East was at hand. The core of the problem was the Fertile Crescent, made up of Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Palestine, “alive with ferment.”

In 1948, when Britain “gave up her League of Nations mandate in Pales-

tine, Israel proclaimed herself a state. The Arabs fought and lost.” Subsequent Arab bitterness extended to Israel’s supporters, Britain and the United States.

When Palestine was partitioned, almost a million Arabs were forced from Israel for “miserable refugee hovels” in surrounding Arab countries. The resulting anger “exploded” hit-and-run attacks on the Israel-Jordan and Israel-Egypt frontiers.

New 1957 friction in the area coincided with the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt: the Arab world’s new hero. Also new, said Ryan, was the influence of Soviets in Egypt, selling Nasser arms he said he needed as a defense against Israel.

“Russian influence was intruding itself into the Middle East with a vengeance. And world communism welcomed the climate of bitterness in which it might hope to flourish.”

British and French planes had bombed Egypt in October to prepare for an invasion of the new Suez Canal zone. The seizure by the Egyptian army of five British supply bases left a “vacuum” of western power in defending against Russia.

Too complicated for a Wood county historian, as it was then for most of the folks here in the Heartland.

Meanwhile Israel occupied the Sinai Desert and Gaza strip, inflaming their neighbors.

General Eisenhower, the most important U.S. military leader of his time, had declared, “We do not accept the use of force as a wise or proper instrument

for the settlement of international disputes.” Now, he considered the situation changed and asked Congress for authority to use U.S. military might if necessary to block Russian intrusion into the Middle East. He also wanted \$400 million for economic aid.

“The President believes that his personal prestige as the leader of the United States, “a *Tribune* editorial said, “may exert a force for peace in critical times that others might not.

“By the same token,” said another commentary in the *Tribune*, “while so advantageously placed on the scene, the U.S. must somehow tackle the long-range settlement of Arab-Israel issues, and other disturbing Middle East questions. Otherwise, the moment of opportunity may pass and the situation may become frozen in the kind of frustrating impasse that has marked such trouble spots as Korea, Indochina and divided Germany.”

Sen. Wiley of Wisconsin, top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he “didn’t hear any opposition.”

Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont), a member of the committee, called on Eisenhower for an estimate of the costs and dangers involved.

Sen. Sparkman (D-Ala) said Eisenhower had “quite a selling job to do.”

Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, the Senate’s Democratic leader, said he would reserve judgment for the time being. It wasn’t so long before he was the one being judged.

02-05-07

Vesper School

Imagine, a separate room for each grade! That's what happened when one big Vesper school closed down four little Vesper schools.

In 1959, an "overflow crowd visited the new one-story, eight-classroom facility at the edge of town. It was the first completed eight-grade school in Wood County to result from the consolidation of surrounding independent rural school districts.

Although new to Wood county, consolidations such as that at Vesper were occurring throughout the nation as more students were bused from rural locations to larger schools.

In Vesper, going out of the "three-r" business (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic) were the Turner, Bean and Snyder schools and the old Vesper village school itself.

A Nov. 8, 1975, Bicentennial-themed story in the *Daily Tribune* said that there had been four different school buildings in the community we call "Vesper."

First was a log cabin in the eastern part of the village built in 1878 with Margaret Hanifin (Mrs. Peter McCamley) as teacher.

Second was a frame structure near the line separating Hansen Township from Sigel township. Teacher T.J. Cooper drove by horse and buggy from Centra-lia in 1880.

Third was a school built in 1892, called "Sand Hill." In August 1894, the fire that burned the western part of Vesper destroyed the two-year-old build-

ing. In response, classes returned to the previously-used building in the eastern part of Vesper, Stephen Brazeau, teacher. In 1895, the frame school building was moved to the western part of town which was considered more centrally-located. Mabel White (Mrs. John Flanigan) was the teacher 1895-97 for \$25 per month. At that time, not so much a baby bulge but an influx of settlers caused the school to become overcrowded. A small addition was built but soon proved inadequate so the too-big district was split between Crescent, Turner and Spring Lake districts.

The fourth school credited to Vesper itself was a two-room brick school built in 1906 by "the Murgatroyds," owners of the Vesper Brick Yard. For a while, only one room was used, by teacher Miss Alice Merrick. In 1909, the building was used as a two-room school with George Varney, principal, Myrtle Rowland the primary teacher.

According to the Bicentennial newspaper account, in 1921, Ralph C. Bennett taught ninth grade in a building other than the school and, in 1922, Wallace Long was employed as a tenth-grade teacher. At the time, the enrollment was about 26. Both 9th and 10th grades were discontinued after two years.

Jerome Seifert told the *Tribune* that he and several other four year olds were enrolled at Vesper because the school board needed more students to qualify for state aid. In the fall, after the funds were allotted, the parents were told the children were too young to attend but the mothers refused to take them back.

When Bessie La Vigne, of Children's Choice fame, taught in the upper grades, a fire broke out but eighth-grade boys doused it.

Fifth-built is the existing structure which, in 1962, became part of the Wisconsin Rapids school district.

In June 1959, construction on Vesper Grade School was progressing rapidly so it could open with the school term in September, according to Matt Knedle, county superintendent of schools.

The Vesper district expanded that summer, attaching Snyder, Bean and Turner school districts. Part of the Crescent district had already been integrated. Turner, built in 1906, was located just southwest of Eight Corners and, in 1958, had 29 pupils. Typical of rural schoolhouses, the one classroom housed eight grades. There was outdoor non-plumbing and little playground equipment.

Already before the completion of the modern new building in 1959, residents had to decide what to do as the district expanded. Should they add more rooms to the structure originally intended only to house pupils from the former Vesper district? The answer was yes.

As of 1975, the fate of former one-room Vesper-area schools was described. Bean: Hansen town hall; Spring Lake: private house; Pleasant View: house; Snyder: 4H Club House; Turner: standing in dilapidated condition; Pioneer: torn down.

Lone Pine and Natwick schools? Gone and almost forgotten, I guess.

02-12-07

The Usual

50 years ago, there was no clue Consolidated wasn't forever.

In 1957, the Wisconsin Rapids offices could have been called "world headquarters" of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. But that language would have been too ostentatious. At the time, the big C was conducting business as usual in its usual from-the-ground-up conservative way.

Consider the retirement of C.E. Jackson as mill manager and the chain of promotions it caused. Stability was the order of the day and long-term service was rewarded.

The press release came from Stanton W. Mead, Consolidated president and son of George W. Mead, builder of the Wisconsin Rapids mill 55 years earlier.

At the time of his retirement, Jackson was production manager of the company's book mills and Wisconsin Rapids Division manager. He had been with the firm 43 years. In 1914, he graduated from the University of Chicago and came to Consolidated as employment manager. When the company constructed a newsprint mill in Port Arthur, Ontario, in 1927, he was named manager of that mill.

In 1929, following the sale of the Port Arthur plant, Jackson returned to Rapids as mill manager and, in 1949, became production manager of book-paper mills. Under his administration, the Rapids mill made the transition from newsprint to enamel papers that determined its historic niche.

After Jackson's retirement, William J. Foote was named director of book paper manufacture at Rapids, Biron and Whiting. Foote, manager of the Wisconsin River Division at Whiting since 1946, had been with the firm 19 years.

He was a graduate of Lawrence College and received a Doctorate from the Institute of Paper Chemistry, Appleton, in 1938, immediately joining Consolidated as chief chemist.

L.W. Murtfeldt, assistant manager of the Wisconsin Rapids Division, succeeded Jackson as mill manager. Murtfeldt, a graduate of Washington University school of engineering, St. Louis, had been with the firm 24 years, in timberlands and manufacturing, and, most lately, was pulp superintendent at Rapids Division.

Stratton Martin, secretary to the vice-president, manufacturing, would succeed Foote as manager at Whiting. Martin, a 1942 graduate of Ripon College, began as a chemist in 1946. He had been with the firm a mere 11 years.

Changing today's topic from industry to commerce, it was already apparent 50 years ago that Illinois had her eye on us. The sale of the landmark Nash block to Hyman Coen, Chicago, was a big step toward the Grand Mall of modern times. Plans in 1957 called for renovation of the building for Montgomery Ward & Co. The Nash edifice covered the entire 100 block of W. Grand Ave., fronting on 1st Ave. S. The property is now a parking lot. Prior to the sale, the block housed on the first floor, Nash Hardware, Jerrold's Clothing Store, IGA Foodliner

and Montgomery Ward retail and mail-order.

Offices on the second floor were: Radio Station WFHR; Milady's Beauty Shop; the business department of *The Tribune*, the Wisconsin Network and WFHR; Household Finance Corp.; and attorney John M. Potter.

The property was named for the late L.M. Nash and owned by his heirs: Charles M. Nash, George Nash, Neil Nash and Mrs. C.G. Mullen.

The block, as it stood in 1957, contained none of the original grocery store on the site, owned by George Corriveau. W.T. Jones and L.M. Nash had purchased the property in 1884 and formed the Centralia Hardware Co.

According to the *Tribune* account, L.M. Alexander (known best for the Nekoosa-Edwards paper company), owned the Nash property for a short time. Alexander, in 1897, sold it back to the Centralia Hardware Co., and in January 1912, Nash himself bought it again, forming the Nash Hardware Co.

The entire block was gutted on April 23, 1937, in the most spectacular and costly fire in the history of the city. It was reconstructed and opened the following year.

The Nash/Montgomery Ward building was razed in the early 1980s, when I was new to the history scene here.

It was apparent that demolition was the order of the day as "heritage" structures were routinely smushed like so many VW "bugs" – or, more to the theme, like old Nash Ramblers.

02-19-07

Red Owl

In 1957, when a supermarket opened at Avon and Market streets, it was a sign of the times and a sign of times to come. Likewise, its disappearance some 30 years later.

The name of this second local “super” food store was “Red Owl.”

If there’s a new supermarket, there’s bound to be a grand opening. Guests at Red Owl’s fete in 1957 included Nels Justeson, Wisconsin Rapids mayor; J.J. Nimtz, president of the Rapids chamber of commerce; and B.T. Ziegler, chamber manager.

A woman selected from the crowd would serve as Red Owl Grand Opening Queen. For her service cutting the ribbon, she would be awarded a set of sewing scissors.

The theme was a modern, “Food from All Over the World,” with Bud Witter, WBAY-TV, Green Bay, who hosted Red Owl’s Sunday feature movie program on that station. Both ends of the half-dozen aisle counters sported a rotating globe, with one larger globe as store centerpiece. A “Spice Island” counter contained samples, “from all over the world.”

Inside, the store design embodied the latest features in “efficiency” and “convenience,” such as refrigerated counters for vegetables, meats and dairy products and merchandise stacked in long aisles, easily reachable by customers roaming the store, serving themselves. Departments ranged from baby foods, “home-style” bakery goods, health and

beauty aids, pet foods, hardware and magazines.

There were five regular checkout stands and one express checkout. “Other features which will make for pleasant shopping conditions include constant soft background music, air conditioning and fluorescent lighting.”

Red Owl boasted of a central location at Avon and Market Streets. At that time, central locations were coveted, whereas, in the 21st Century, sites at the edge of town are more likely to be developed. A large, adjoining parking lot, crucial to the supermarket concept, was being created.

The visual highlight was an eye-catching 36-foot high pylon, surfaced with glistening white porcelain enamel bearing the traditional Red Owl trademark. Outlined with neon tubing, the big bird’s face glowed after dark.

Russell Chevrette was to be the first manager. He had most recently managed Red Owl at Gladstone, Mich. Assistant manager was Jerome Bentzler, most lately from Sheboygan.

Francis Kirby, the meat manager, arrived from Green Bay and produce manager Alfred Feifarek, from Appleton.

The *Tribune* reported that the new Red Owl “agency” was to be the hub of a shopping center located across from the courthouse. Up to four more stores would stand in a row along the south end of the parking lot, the whole assuming an L shape.

The store and land, on a long-term lease to Red Owl, were owned by Dan

Estreen, Wausau. He had purchased lumber yard property from Charles and Elbert Kellogg, leasing it to A. Rounds Metcalf, proprietor of Rapids Lumber & Supply Co.

The Metcalf lumber yard switched its operations in July 1956 to “the old feed mill building” at 8th and West Grand Avenues.

Construction of Red Owl, under direction of the local Frank J. Henry company, began in August, shortly after the lumber yard was demolished.

The cost of the concrete block structure was about \$130,000. It would employ about 40.

Officials from the Red Owl’s general office at Hopkins, Minn., attended the Rapids festivities. The Red Owl organization now had 151 corporate stores.

The floor plan came in at 10,000 square feet. Comparing 1957 supermarket to 2007 supercenter, a Wal-Mart ranges from 99,000 square feet to 261,000 square feet with an average size of about 187,000.

By the time of its closure in the 1980s, Red Owl seemed to be a homey, local, Mom and Pop store, but it wasn’t. Red Owl was part and parcel of the super-trend that swept away the corner groceries, butcher shops and bakeries that we more often wax nostalgic about.

Its arrival prophesied the super-stores to come and, when it abandoned the courthouse site, Red Owl’s example pointed the way to 8th Street.

02-26-07

Honoring the Sabbath

Local preachers gave it a shot but religion never had a chance against Eighth Street.

As we follow the “fifty years ago” timeline, not only had Save More opened a supermarket but a Marshall-Wells self-service hardware store had joined it at 2513 8th St. S. (It would become “Neipp’s.”)

The shopping center was owned by Commercial Expansion Corp., Wausau, which planned 20 units within the next few years. The local Frank J. Henry, Inc., general contractors, had erected the hardware store. According to the *Tribune* “Henry is secretary of the corporation.”

The two stores would be open 8 a.m. – 9 p.m., daily. Staying open late on weekdays was a new “super” store thing.

They were open, except for Sunday. In the River City of 1956, the majority of grocery store operators agreed at a meeting of the Heart of Wisconsin Retail Food Dealers in Wisconsin Rapids City Hall to close on that day, prompted by please from religious leaders defending the sanctity of the Sabbath.

Truth to tell, some Mom and Pop grocers were glad to be relieved of the burden of a seven-day work week. Important to the implementation of the Sunday closing was the announcement by a representative of Save More Super Market, Joseph Varga, that Save More would “go along with the majority.”

One of the Mom & Pops, George H. Peterson Sr., proprietor of Peterson’s

Grocery, presided over the grocers meeting. “I don’t want anyone to feel that we are compelling them to close their stores on Sundays. Those who decide to continue Sunday operations may do so and it’ll be all right with the rest of us. But as for me I’m going to close regardless of what anyone else decides to do.”

Father Carl Dockendorff, of St. Vincent Catholic church, declared that the “law of God prescribes one day of rest each week and if we work on Sundays it’s a violation of God’s law.

“I’m not blaming the storekeepers but perhaps more so the buyers whose demand keeps stores open on Sundays. We try to tell our people that they can train themselves to do their shopping in six days.”

As a sociologist, Dockendorff didn’t have a prayer.

A 2006 story by Richard Morin opens with a lead more provocative than mine: “Who knew Satan worked at the local mall?”

The study he was reviewing: “The Church vs. the Mall: What Happens When Religion Faces Increased Secular Competition?”

Scholars Jonathan Gruber and Daniel Hungerman determined that allowing an extra day to shop contributes significantly to wicked behavior, especially among people who are the most religious. When states eliminated “blue laws” that prohibited certain activities on Sunday, church attendance declined while drinking and drug use increased, especially among those who frequently attended church services.

At one time, according to Morin, all but eight states had blue laws.

Apparently, a few still have in 2007 statewide Sunday selling bans on some products or leave it up to local jurisdictions to decide the issue, with mall owners among those leading the fight for freedom of shopping.

When I was an innocent babe with dew dripping from behind my ears, I followed my old German grandpa to the barn before sunrise. After morning chores we went off to church on time every time, undoubtedly with a dash of barnyard cologne around the ankles.

Typically, chicken dinner with relatives followed and a lot of Sabbath sitting and resting, maybe croquet in season. But evening chores still had to be attended to; cows have to be milked.

Other Sundays, at my Two Mile Avenue ranch house here, the routine had slight similarity.

Out to the breezeway before the break of day to do the chores: assembling the *Milwaukee Journal* Sunday edition that had been delivered during the night.

In winter, I trudged out with my red Radio Flyer wagon piled high with heavy *Journals*. Down the frosty lanes of Woodland Drive and Sampson Street, up through the new subdivisions on Third.

In summer, it took several trips on my bike. But in any season I had to be done in time for Sunday school at nine, church and home for fried chicken. Not much to do after that. Stores were closed.

03-05-07

Blei

Door County is a good place. If you're a writer: with the "New England" of the Midwest to celebrate.

If you're a writer: with an audience of well-educated spenders who rock the shops of Egg Harbor, Fish Creek and Ephraim. If you're Norbert Blei, the Uncle Dave of Ellison Bay: with a portmanteau of genuine true stories that could be called, "Door County Memoirs."

In 2005, I spoke with Norb in his writing den, a converted chicken-coop with "MSPT-DC" subtly-enscribed above the doorway. The perpetually-multitasking Blei was compiling two books: a biography of a lighthouse keeper and *The Nature of Door: Door County Writers and Artists on Preservation of Place*, edited with Karen Yancey for the Door County Land Trust. Both are published by Blei's Cross+Roads Press.

Nature of Door is a collection of writings defending 21 locations "that have a great deal of meaning and that the Land Trust has an interest in preserving." (Think "fen," "swamp," "pond," "swale" "farm," "forest" and "woods.")

The Nature of Door. It's a good book. If you think nature needs help. If you like the palpable affection and loyalty to natural sites of the writers, some of whom were actually born in the region. It's a good book if you like highly personal, reasonable essays calling for protection of the best places, however small or grand.

A foreword by Yancey says, "Protect-

ing, sharing and celebrating these remnants of wilderness, these healthy wild places that nourish us, is our gift to future generations, and to ourselves."

But, why worry? Door County is a good place. If you're a tourist.

"It's true," said Blei. "It's just a beautiful peninsula. All these places, all the great places, everybody wants to go there."

A good place. If you're a wealthy property owner. "They're moaning about the McMansions," said Blei. "They have a new name. They want to be called estate homes."

"The mansion I made a lot of fun of ten years ago, built for \$7-8 million, sold a few months ago for \$22 million, sight unseen, to a guy in California. People with their second home, third home. A friend has three places, one on Washington Island, one in Minnesota, one in Florida.

"Everybody complains, even the people buying in; that's the riddle. If they come with a reverence for the landscape, what they do in turn is to make it over into what they have just left. More shops, more galleries, high-end restaurants.

"I ate at the Waterfront. I had a \$100 gift certificate; it was \$149 for two."

Wood County is also a good place.

"If you like "that restaurant in the hotel," Blei said. If you like strip malls better than cute little shops. If you like pulp mills better than condominiums and marinas. "My fondest memory of Wisconsin Rapids as a place," he said, "was really along the river and I can't

recall much more, except a great library. I have always liked that library. But you guys live there; you see some of the finer things."

Yes, we see Wood County is a good place. If you look with satisfaction on the tourists and plutocrats sucked up Highway 57 to Door County like flies into an Oreck XL21 Titanium Series vacuum. If you like the fact that they're not bothering us here in Wood County, where I don't stop the handy prankster from depositing dead skunks on Highway 34 to deter casual travel.

Appreciating the view from the nearest lighthouse, Blei said water is "the most magical phenomena of the whole county. There's always that sense of the beyond that's out there, almost within reach."

Here's one for the book: Nicolet Bay in Peninsula State Park. For many visitors, it epitomizes the charm and beauty of the Door Peninsula. It's a good place.

If you like a gorgeous seascape, neo-Gatsby yachts in the harbor, snack shack ice cream cones on the deck and sewage on the beach. A necklace of stinking, weedy, pathogen-brimming slime, wrapped around frolicking tourist children, including my own.

The One Mile Creek of my childhood was a good place too. If you like your rivulets overrun by development and brown globs draped in green fronds floating like jellyfish through John Murgatroyd's Garden of Eden.

03-12-07

Building

AS Tennyson said, “The old order changeth, giving place to the new...”

Anyway, that’s what the 1957 *Daily Tribune* quoted. Or we can go by the opposite, in the words of less-lyrical sages, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

To be specific and to follow our “50-years-ago” timeline, what was a-changin’ in February 1957?

- Couple weeks ago, I told you a Red Owl store had come to an East Side location at the edge of what was then considered “downtown.” The Red Owl project coincided with the construction of the new courthouse and the demolition of two “ancient” buildings: the 1881 courthouse and the 1895 sheriff’s office and jail at 431 Baker St.

A portion of the jail building had been used as living quarters for sheriffs and their families for a long time. After operations were transferred into courthouse quarters under new Wood County sheriff Thomas H. Forsyth, the last occupant of the old jail was Mrs. Arthur Berg, wife of the outgoing sheriff.

Mrs. Berg said she had been getting up by at least 5 a.m. to prepare three meals every day for an average of ten occupants of the jail. She also packed lunch every morning for prisoners, who, under the terms of their sentence, were released for daytime employment.

As one prisoner who was allowed out to work each day told her, “You pack a lunch just like my ma used to.”

- Also in the courthouse area was Warsinske Motor Co., 162-72 2nd St. N. But Warsinske said its entire business would be transferred to 411 8th St. S., where it had purchased the real estate of Reiland-Pontiac and a location at which Warsinske continues to operate.

The “downtown” Warsinske building had housed a Dodge-Plymouth dealership since it was constructed in 1934. The Reiland-Pontiac building had been erected in 1943 and 1947.

- Near 8th Street in a developing residential area was the new St Luke’s Lutheran church at 10th St. S. and Wood Ave. It was attached to an existing chapel which would become the educational adjunct. Guest speaker for the opening ceremony was Rev. L.H. Goetz, Nekoosa. A concert featured Carol Kuechle of Immanuel Lutheran church.

- Of special interest to aspiring diddyboppers such as myself were plans by Theodore Walrath for converting the Palace Theater building, 141 3rd Ave. S., into a ballroom and recreation center.

Walrath was president of Kruger-Walrath Corp., a realty firm which had purchased the theater from Mrs. Henrietta Eckardt.

For those who have wondered in retrospect how a theater floor could be flat enough to dance on: extensive remodeling was in progress, under the direction of architect C.J. Billmeyer, leveling the floor and excavating the basement.

The first floor ballroom would be used for dances, meetings, sales conferences, demonstrations, banquets,

wedding receptions and parties. The basement, to be entered via a stairway in the theater lobby, had been leased to Mr. and Mrs. William Leder, operators of Bill’s Billiards, 251 W. Grand Ave., for use as a soda fountain and pool hall. The entire operation would be called the Palace Ballroom and Recreation Parlor.

Walrath said he felt a need for such a place, “operated on sound principles to provide good entertainment. Nothing in Central Wisconsin will be able to compare with it.”

- A major new building was in planning that would compete with the Palace for the attention of young persons with active reflexes: the new community center that would house the South Wood County YMCA, featuring a large indoor swimming pool and gymnasium.

Designed by Donn Hougen, the \$1 million building, built by the Nekoosa-Edwards Foundation for lease at a nominal fee to the local “Y,” would be named, “John E. Alexander South Wood County YMCA, Inc.,” after the president of the association. Other officers were Stanton W. Mead, Dwight H. Teas and Neil Nash.

- This year marks a century since the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum at 540 Third St. S. was constructed. From 1948-1970, it was the T.B. Scott Public Library.

03-19-07

Herr Sigel

More than a coincidence? The Wood County township organized Jan. 10, 1863, took the name “Sigel” in the midst of our Civil War. At the time, Franz Sigel was a general in the Union army. Sigel was a German immigrant like many of the settlers arriving in central Wisconsin. Why wouldn’t the township take its name from the popular general?

Other townships of “Sigel” did the same, in the counties of Chippewa, Wis., Huron, Mich., Shelby, Ill., and Brown, Minn.

The good news about Sigel is that he had rallied many of the newly-arrived German population to the Union cause.

The bad news is that he was one of the worst generals we had.

Born in 1824, Sigel joined the German revolution of 1849 to become the rebel government’s Minister of War. When the revolution failed, he came to the United States. He taught in New York City schools before becoming the director of education in St. Louis.

When the Civil War began, in 1861, Sigel, an opponent of slavery, organized a regiment and, within a few weeks, was promoted to Brigadier General. This allowed him a leadership role in the first major Civil War battle west of the Mississippi River, at Wilson’s Creek, near Springfield, Mo., in which Nathaniel Lyon became the first Union general killed in combat.

It was Sigel who urged Lyon to divide his army though Lyon was outnumbered.

That decision and the fog of war brought about a disaster.

Early in the war, the enemy was wearing uniforms similar to those of Sigel’s troops, who saw the Confederates coming but believed they were Union reinforcements until the newcomers opened fire.

Sigel wrote to Major-General Fremont Aug. 18, 1861: “It is impossible for me to describe the consternation and frightful confusion which was occasioned by this unfortunate event. The cry ‘They [Lyon’s troops] are firing against us,’ spread like wildfire through our ranks.

“The enemy arrived within ten paces from the mouth of our cannon, killed the horses, turned the flanks of the infantry, and forced them to retire. The troops were throwing themselves into the bushes and by-roads, retreating as well as they could, followed and attacked incessantly by large bodies of Arkansas and Texas cavalry.

Sigel resigned his commission in May 1865 and became editor of a German journal in Baltimore, Md. He moved to New York City, and in 1869 was the unsuccessful Republican candidate for secretary of state of New York.

Sigel was appointed a collector of internal revenue in May 1871 and, as an “adherent” of the Democratic party, was, in 1886, appointed pension-agent in New York by President Grover Cleveland (who also appointed his friend, T.E. Nash, of Grand Rapids/Centralia to a government position).

Sigel’s last years were devoted to the editorship of the *New York Monthly*, a

German-American periodical.

Sigel died in New York City on Aug. 21, 1902. A monument in his honor was unveiled in Riverside Drive, New York City, in October 1907. Not far away is Grant’s tomb.

“New Market,” Virginia, in May 1864 had been another disaster for Sigel, this time at the hands of Confederate general John C. Breckinridge — more embarrassing because young Virginia military cadets played a key role.

His performance at New Market was summed up by Gen. Henry Halleck in a telegram to Grant: “Instead of advancing on Staunton he is already in full retreat on Strasburg. If you expect anything from him you will be mistaken. He will do nothing but run. He never did anything else.”

Sigel was relieved of his command in for “lack of aggression” and spent the rest of the war without an active command.

The Wood County town’s namesake was immortalized in a humorous Civil war song in German dialect:

*Und now I gets mine sojer clothes,
I’m going to fight mit Sigel.
Un ven Cheff Davis’ mens we meet,
Ve Schlauch em like de tuyvil;
Dere’s only one ting vot I fear,
Ven pattling for de Eagle;
I vont get not no lager bier,
Ven I goes to fight mit Sigel.*

03-26-07

High Fliers

It's been a month or three since a reader, rusticated in upstate New York, took time to pen a letter to the *Tribune* editor, in appreciation of my "tabloid journalism." Like any purveyor of the prurient, I wondered what to do for an encore, within the purview of an admittedly circumspect local clientele.

In other words, how to get in something racy about a person who can't sue, which usually means someone famous or dead. It doesn't hurt if the story is true, which a good percentage of mine are.

Naturally, I looked to Jere (pronounced "Jerry") Witter.

"Young Jere" was the "playboy" son of banker Isaac Witter and grandson of "old" Jere Witter, who was a respectable partner in almost every local enterprise.

A Young Jere expose is perfect for 2007. This is the "Year of the Museum," for the South Wood County Historical Corp., because the building is celebrating its construction by the Witter family in 1907.

Common knowledge has it that Young Jere, briefly a rival to Stanton Mead as Consolidated heir, liked to buzz the Rapids mill with his aero-plane. Conventional wisdom has him flying under the Grand Avenue Bridge. If he had tried, he probably wouldn't have lived long enough to establish a legend.

Jere's son, also named Jere, became a well-known television news writer and reporter in California. He died last year at age 79.

Jere III called me a couple times and told me about his dad, who, it seemed, was pretty much the same old Young Jere to the end. Hunting through an on-line newspaper archives, I hoped for something new, immoral and illegal. To our mutual disappointment, the only crimes were misdemeanors.

"Fined for Speeding":

In July 1923, Witter, of a Third street address that is now the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum, paid a fine and costs amounting to \$13.16 in Judge E.N. Pomainville's court after pleading guilty to "reckless and fast" driving on Vine street. It had occurred June 20 but, owing to the defendant's absence from the city, the matter was not brought up until over a month later.

"Local Youth Hits Car of State Officer":

Madison, Nov. 14, 1923: Adjutant General Ralph Immel narrowly escaped serious injury when an auto driven by Jere Witter, Wisconsin Rapids, state university student, collided with and demolished the car driven by Immel. The adjutant general received lacerations about the head and one student was slightly injured.

"Avoiding Collision, Car Strike Poles":

September 1928: "A large coupe driven by Jere Witter of this city, after being crowded off the road to avoid striking an oncoming automobile, crashed into two telephone poles at the curve on Highway 54 just southwest of the local cemetery Friday night. "Mr. Witter escaped with only minor cuts and bruises from the

flying glass of the windshield, broken by the impact. He was alone in the car at the time of the accident. The car was badly damaged."

"Forced Landing Near Nekoosa Hurts Plane":

September 1942: A plane piloted by Witter was damaged when he made a forced landing in a field three miles east of Nekoosa. Witter was unhurt and the right side of the plane's landing gear damaged. The plane, owned by A.E. Padags, manager of Tri-City airport, was hauled to the facility for repairs.

Witter, of Los Angeles, was in town visiting his parents, Mr. and Mrs. I.P. Witter.

Another young local flier was Thomas Nash, son of Mr. and Mrs. Guy Nash and grandson of Nekoosa Papers, Inc. founder T.E. Nash.

Tom, the older brother of Philleo and Jean, attended Amherst College and was featured by the *Tribune* when he returned home from working his way through the Panama Canal Zone by washing dishes and other galley work.

An Oct. 2, 1929, story said Tom passed his "check" flight at the Great Lakes Naval Training station and completed his first solo flight.

He was to be transferred with the other successful students to the training field at Pensacola, Fla.

Only a couple years later, Nash died in a plane crash. When I find the tabloid story that relates his death, I will pass it on to you.

04-03-07

Sara Kenyon

The *Daily Tribune* of July 1956 provided a reminiscence by a woman who filled the role many think I now occupy, that of oldest native resident of Wisconsin Rapids.

For most of her life, Sara Kenyon, 92 in 1956, resided on Third Avenue South in the neighborhood she was born in about 1864. The family's log house had been the only permanent home in the area. The home had one long room with a summer kitchen and a bedroom. In winter, only the large room was used.

When Sara was born, she slept on a trundle bed that pulled out from under the parents' bed. Her five brothers slept in beds their father made.

Kenyon's earliest recollections were of Indians who brought blueberries, venison and cranberries and sometimes spent the night on the floor of the house. Others camped where First and Third Avenues South meet.

Kenyon's father was Goodman Germanson, a logger and riverman. Her mother, Elizabeth Teiman, cooked at the Centralia House hotel, just south of where the *Daily Tribune* is now.

Like numerous "pioneers of the Pinery," Germanson worked in the logging camps in winter and as a river pilot in summer, rafting lumber from mills along the Wisconsin to St. Louis on the Mississippi.

When she was five years old, Sara attended a two-room frame building she dated to 1861, at what was later the West Side market square.

When "Lowell" school was built, she attended under Alfred C. McComb, principal, and upper grades teacher. The primary teacher was Lizzie Douglas.

When Sara was eight, the family moved to the corner of Cranberry Street (West Grand Avenue) and Fifth Avenue North.

During vacations, she and her brother George picked cranberries on the Dutruit marsh, where the WFHR transmitter was located in 1956. They received 75 cents a bushel, the money going for clothes.

To supply breweries, early settlers grew hop beds. Sara said she picked hops for Sampsons in the town of Grand Rapids, for Lords on the Ten Mile Creek and for Paynes on the old poor farm road, receiving 25 cents for seven bushels.

At age 16, Sara started teaching at Five Mile school (later named Columbia) in the town of Saratoga, where she taught two terms for \$23 a month, paying \$6 for board with the John Chrystal family.

She remembered the names of her 11 scholars: Mike and Belle Mathews, George and Clark Snyder, Hugh and Mary McCamley, Fred and Joe Snyder, Emma and Ella Turley and Jim Keough. All were deceased by the time of the interview.

She then taught at Auburndale and Nasonville, under superintendents T.W. Nash and Edward Lynch.

She then became the first woman to work in the First National Bank when Jere D. Witter was president and it oc-

cupied a stone structure across from the old Witter Hotel near what is now the east end of the present Jackson Street Bridge.

Except for a time in which she left the bank and "opened the books" for the Centralia Pulp & Water Power Co., Sara worked at the bank until she was married. She was at the bank during the flood of 1888 that took out the wooden bridge. Sara heard the structure crack and rushed down to the river to see Mrs. Sam Boles, the only person on the bridge, escape to the Centralia side.

With the bridge out, in order to get to work, West-Sider Sara purchased a boat in partnership with Fred Brasted, which they sold when a ferry started operating.

In 1890, Sara "Goodman," the name taken by the children, following Norwegian custom, married Jesse A. Kenyon, a railroad worker. They lived at Tomah, Babcock, and Ironwood, Mich., where he worked in the electric light plant for 13 years.

It was stated that the Kenyons owned their home at 370 3rd Ave. S. for 58 years, moving to the Wood County Infirmary when they were 88. When Jesse died in 1953, Sara moved in with her niece, Mrs. William A. Fischer.

Pleased with the way times had improved since she was a girl, she still felt, much in the manner of nonagenarians today, that "people were happier in those days because they didn't have anything to worry about and had to work harder."

04-09-07

Tom Nash, Pilot

Compared to daredevil Jere Witter, Tom Nash seemed like a good bet to live a long life. He was described as a careful pilot and sensible person.

Like Witter, a member of one of the Wisconsin Rapids' prominent families, Nash had been born in 1904 at the Nash-owned Ashland County, Wis., mill town of Shanagolden. He came to Rapids with his parents, Guy and Florence Nash, in 1908.

He graduated from Lincoln high school, attended Amherst college, Amherst, Mass., and completed his bachelors degree at the University of Wisconsin in 1926. Nash worked for a year as a chemist for the Goodyear Rubber company, Akron, Ohio, but resigned because of illness.

Regaining his health, he joined the Marine Reserve Flying Corps, which he left in 1930 and entered the Nepco School of Flying. He received his transport pilot license and was employed at the Nepco (now Alexander Field) airport as chief instructor.

As Nepco instructor, Nash was giving lessons to E.L. Moore, a Marshfield train dispatcher for the Soo Line railroad. Working nights, Moore was able to take flying lessons during the daytime and had a limited commercial license. He was able to tell Major L.G. Mulzer, head of the flying school, a somewhat hazy story about what happened on June 24, 1931.

Moore and Nash had "hopped off" from the airport in a Waco F biplane to practice forced landings with Moore flying the ship. They had passed over a field and were proceeding north along what is now 8th Street/Highway 13 at an altitude of about 100 feet.

Nash, looking to the right, spotted a grain field just east of then-named Highway 73 and shut off the power. His purpose was that his student make a "dead stick landing" in the field. The student, Moore, looking out the left side, believed the instructor's move was a signal to turn left and land in the field which they had just passed. Moore attempted the sharp left turn and because of the power being shut off, the ship lost flying speed, went into a spin and nosed directly into the ground.

The incident happened about 100 feet west of then-State Trunk Highway 73, less than a quarter of a mile south of the Two-Mile school (at the Two Mile Avenue corner) at about 2:35 in the afternoon.

George Snyder, Oscar Neitzel and Walter L. Wood saw the crash and rushed to the scene. They pulled Moore from the cockpit and did not realize Nash was in the plane, the cowl of the front cockpit having been completely crushed.

Snyder rushed to his home and telephoned the airport, at which time attendants inquired as to Nash's condition. It was then Snyder returned and cut the fuselage to remove Nash.

An ambulance was summoned. Nash was pronounced dead by a physician

before he and Moore were rushed to Riverview hospital.

Moore, able to speak from his hospital bed on three occasions, told Mulzer that all control parts of the ship were functioning properly and that they had not had motor trouble, as was believed by Snyder. The motor had been throttled down by Nash, preparing for the landing.

The following day, Moore, 31, died at Riverview hospital at 10 p.m. He had fractured his right thigh, a left elbow, three ribs on the right side and suffered lacerations about the face and body along with even more severe internal injuries that proved to be the cause of death.

Nash's funeral was held at the home of his parents at 1020 Oak St., where local attorney and South Wood County Historical Corp. founder T.W. Brazeau delivered a short eulogy.

Pallbearers were Dick Hunter, Charles Heath and Wilbur Morgan, coworkers at the airport, and friends Gilbert Dickerman, James Kellogg and our previous subject, Jere Witter.

Besides his parents, Tom Nash also left brother Philleo, later Wisconsin Lt. Governor and U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and sister Jean, a notable cranberry grower, who, prior to her death, provided significant family archives to the SWCHC Museum, 540 Third St. S.

04-16-07

War Against Nature

The spineless little buggers had stung us where it hurts most, in our own backyards. We struck back with an arsenal of mass destruction against their puny weapons of mass distraction. Clouds of poison gas against clouds of suicidal individuals fighting for the survival of their wicked kind. It was a conflict that had been going on for eternity and one we are destined to be entangled in the rest of our lives and the lifetimes of our children; we had declared war on Mother Nature.

After years of tolerating annual incursions, Wisconsin Rapids in the summer of 1956 launched an all-out campaign, specifically targeted against the mosquito. In an effort to stamp out the menace at its breeding sites, city crews dumped waste drain oil on stagnant water-filled pits located in the city's outlying areas. Street Commissioner Walter Arndt reported 200 gallons of waste oil had been disposed of by May.

Use of this oil, he pointed out, was economical; it had already served its purpose in the crankcases of city trucks and machinery.

City workers also began spraying other mosquito breeding places with Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane. Marshy areas along the northern reaches of 5th Ave. N. were the first targets of "DDT."

Other types of treatment were designed to kill mosquito larvae, a prerequisite of any effective control program.

The program here was in the charge of the Board of Health, assisted by E.H.

Fisher, a University of Wisconsin entomologist. Fisher said the city was "wise" in instituting the control program as early as they had. "Although people aren't aware of mosquitoes until they have to start slapping them, a control program to be effective must be adhered to throughout the season."

Home-owners were urged to eliminate breeding places in their own yards by cleaning clogged rain gutters, scummy bird baths and other places where stagnant water accumulated. At the same time, a second campaign on another front was doomed to failure, this time against a foreign infiltrator: European elm bark beetles.

Spraying was scheduled to eradicate a second brood of the culprit expected to emerge in the state, a major step toward checking the Dutch elm disease already reported in four Wisconsin cities and linked to the beetles.

Once again, experts from the state urged militant action. E.L. Chambers, state entomologist, recommended a vigorous municipality-directed spraying program coupled with prompt identification and removal of diseased trees. He said the only way to permanently control the disease was for local government units to purchase spray outfits and treat the elms in the community twice a year with DDT spray. Too many communities were adopting a "wait and see" attitude and postponing action toward the always fatal disease until it had become well entrenched.

The first infected tree in the state was detected July 6, 1956, in Beloit. Dis-

eased trees had been discovered in Wauwatosa, Racine and Kenosha.

The fungus disease, for which there was no known cure, had been moving northward through Illinois at a rate of 10 counties per year, spread by the beetles and by elm roots.

Some Eastern states seemed to have stalled the invasion and elm trees were not necessarily headed for extinction, Chambers said. He noted that all trees have natural enemies which can usually be controlled. Healthy vigorous trees rarely became infected and that is why trees in rural areas almost never developed the disease.

The cost of spraying a tree was about \$6 and one spraying would suffice for the year. When a diseased tree was found, the advice was to cut and burn it, strip the stump of bark and spray it with DDT, followed by immediate spraying of all elm trees within three blocks.

The insect-ridding properties of DDT had been discovered in 1939 by a Nobel Prize-winning Swiss chemist, Paul Muller. Unlike arsenic and cyanide, it didn't seem very toxic to humans.

Other advantages were that it killed most insects without hurting mammals; lasted a long time; did not dissolve in rain and was inexpensive. Unfortunately for lovers of summer freedom and the 4th of July, the war against mosquitoes was all too obviously unsuccessful; defending the noble elm against bark beetles didn't work out too well either.

04-23-07

Myron In Chicago

Betty Boop. Given enough time, ingenuity and trademark infringement, the “Boop-Oop-A-Doop” cartoon-figure, River City’s most recognizable product, may one day replace the cranberry in our hearts and logos. Absurdly enough, the fictitious flapper, Betty Boop, is going strong after almost 80 years.

Conceived in 1930 as a French Poodle, Betty went human and was named in 1932. Betty’s daddy, figuratively, was our native son and now-renowned animator Myron “Grim” Natwick (1890-1990).

In December 1910 at age 20, Natwick wrote home from Chicago in his typically droll fashion to the then “*Grand Rapids Tribune*,” which called the letter, “Thrilling Experiences in a Great City.”

“I have noticed that when the great people of Grand Rapids make a voyage to some new and interesting locality, they write an awe-inspiring letter to one of the home papers and tell all about their trip in a manner that is athrob with unusual dullness. This keenly observed custom I have vowed not to overlook; hence this letter telling all about Chicago.

“To quote a hackneyed phrase, let me say that Chicago is quite a large place,—much larger than Grand Rapids. There are a good many people here whom I am not acquainted with as yet. I had always heard that Chicago was a wonderful city, but I have not seen any-

thing very wonderful about it. Collars cost fifteen cents apiece here, the same as they do in Grand Rapids.

“Chicago products we hear so much about up in Wisconsin are without honor in their own town.

“If a merchant (meaning store keeper) down here gets hold of a few pounds of genuine Wisconsin dairy butter, he thinks he’s the whole cheese and makes haste to put a big sign in his window telling all about it. They are importing Christmas trees here now; trees whose marks and pedigrees prove them to be thoroughly Wisconsin grown. A tree that sells for thirty or forty cents up there will bring no less than two dollars and a half here.

“No, Chicago is not seriously troubled with wonderfulness. The sun rises and sets here much the same as it does in Grand Rapids. There are English sparrows here and house flies and cockroaches, and the river banks don’t begin to compare with those up home.

“Seeing men killed by accident and by street cars has become a mere pastime to me. Murder and suicide are amusements that still thrive in these parts, and marriage is also a common occurrence. There are a number of people down here who have acquired a bad habit of staving in people’s skulls at night and then taking the money out of their pockets. There have been numerous hold-up demonstrations in this immediate neighborhood, which makes life here quite interesting.

“When I come home late at night, which is very seldom as you publish

this letter, I always choose a well lighted path.

“I have figured out several adequate methods of squelching thugs, and yet somehow, when I think of bumping my nose against the cold, pulcless [pulseless?] foreground [?] of a forty-four caliber revolver, when there is nothing in sight but darkness and the gruff voice of a masked thug, I frankly confess that I am possessed of no surging, uncontrollable lust for the thrill and inspiration of a hold-up adventure.

“Yours Pathetically,

“Grim Natwick

“P.S. I am not solicitous of publicity. That is not why I write this letter. Glory and popularity have never been pet indulgences of mine. I write you merely to let you know that I am still well and squirming...”

Grim Natwick is the subject of the premier exhibit at the South Wood County Historical Corp., now celebrating the “Year of the Museum.” The former T.B. Scott Public Library on Third Street is 100 years old and the society itself is just over 50.

Not a River City product, Mildred Natwick, Grim’s cousin, was a fairly well-known actress. To my surprise, I found that she had a nephew named Myron Natwick (II), a “familiar” TV and movie actor who played in “Amber’s Story” and lots of other movies I haven’t heard of.

What relationship Myron II has to our own Myron has yet to be determined.

04-30-07

T.W.B.

Most distinguished alumnus of the Wisconsin Rapids public high school? Could it have been Corydon T. Purdy? Who the heck was Corydon T. Purdy?

In 1934, a Rapids attorney, Theodore W. Brazeau, presented Lincoln High School with an autographed photograph and biographical sketch of Purdy, the New York architect and engineer, and declared him the most distinguished alumnus of "Lincoln" high school.

Or was T.W. Brazeau himself the most distinguished – at least among those who didn't roam to greener pastures?

Certainly, the South Wood County Historical Corp., now celebrating the 100th anniversary of its museum building, owes Brazeau a lifetime achievement award as a founder and instinctive historian of long standing.

Brazeau provided reminiscences for the Wood County centennial on July 31, 1956. At age 83, he was one of the oldest native-born residents and an active attorney since 1900.

Theodore W., often called Thede, was born to Mrs. and Mr. Stephen Brazeau, a barber, in a frame house at the corner of 10th and Baker streets, 17 years after the organization of Wood County. He was one of 13 children born, of which 10 grew to maturity with six graduating from high school, a high number then.

Brazeau attended the old Howe High School. It had no library and no athletics, he said. Boys exercised by chopping wood for the school stove. Other activi-

ties at Howe, according to Brazeau, included fist fights, wrestling matches and jumping the old wooden fence around the school yard.

During his school years, came the flood of 1880, when water flowed down main street and knocked several buildings into the river, including Ferguson's hardware with Ferguson in it.

Upon graduation from Howe, Brazeau took a job as a teacher in a country school (Doudville in the town of Rudolph) at \$30 per month, walking the five or so miles out from his house and back at night. On paydays, he had to walk two miles farther to get his pay check.

The former prosecutor said law enforcement was not as efficient in the early years of his law practice, when "all a sheriff had to have was a big neck."

He recalled the famous county murder trial of John Magnuson in which Brazeau was the prosecuting attorney. The Magnuson case had been written up in magazines and criminal annals as one of the great examples of the collection and use of circumstantial evidence.

Political life, Brazeau said, was very fierce, even involving the Henry Hayden murder of 1880. Hayden, an attorney, was shot to death near the corner of West Grand and 3rd Avenues by William H. Cochran. The victim was a leading Democrat in the area and it was contended that political enemies had encouraged Cochran to shoot him.

The defendant, Cochran, was acquitted on the grounds that Hayden had been interfering in his domestic affairs but the case "divided the town into two terrible

political factions," said Brazeau.

Local industry in the early days was milling, lumbering and foundry work. Brazeau named the Grand Rapids Foundry Co. in the swimming pool area; the Jackson Milling Co. on the west side; and the Grand Rapids Milling Co. on the east side. Both shipped in grain from the west and used water power for the milling process.

There were numerous sawmills and houses in town that still had huge white pine stumps in the yards. Indians were numerous; hundreds came from the Black River Falls area to pick blueberries and cranberries then growing wild in the lowlands. Travel was done mostly on foot. Only the rich could afford a horse and buggy. Brazeau said John Arpin had the first automobile in the area, around 1903.

In his teens one of the favorite hunting spots was along the Four Mile Creek. "We would walk out there and hunt rabbits, squirrels and partridge. Then we would build a fire from leaves and twigs and cook a squirrel or rabbit to eat."

Deer were plentiful. Brazeau recalled that Reuben Lyon killed 75 one fall, which he sold to butcher shops for resale. Shops carried a lot of venison and bear meat. "This was a hunting and fishing paradise."

The game was slaughtered locally. The slaughter houses were unsanitary and gave off a terrific smell. "We used to go out to the slaughter house to shoot rats, which were as thick as flies," he said.

05-07-07

Sandy at the Library

My first job was parking bicycles,” said former T.B. Scott librarian Sandy Young, now Head of Technical Services at McMillan Memorial Library. “They’d ride their bikes here and just drop them on the front steps,” she said, while visiting the old library, now the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum at 540 Third St. S.

“Miss Dudgeon didn’t like that. I had to be out there to make sure they stood their bikes up in the rack. Everything was stricter in those days. You were quiet in here. It was almost a whisper.”

T.B. Scott Public Library head librarian Edith Dudgeon, “ran a tight ship. She could do every job here and knew how long it would take you to do it. There was a time when we were required to read a certain number of books and report on them in a staff meeting,” said Young.

“She did a lot of the cataloguing. We didn’t have any professional librarians besides her; she was THE librarian.”

Dudgeon also had a progressive side. “I think I was the first staff member to be pregnant here. Miss Dudgeon had to go to the board and get special permission to let me keep working until the baby was born. Once I started looking pregnant, I could only work in the processing department. I came back for a month or so but it didn’t work out as far as child care, so I quit in 1964.”

“Miss Dudgeon was there at McMillan in 1973 when I went back to

work but she retired in a year or two.”

How did then-named Sandra Kay Mortimer, a town of Rudolph resident, find herself working at the city library? Her mother told her to get a job and Lincoln high school guidance counselor Frances Nairn sent her to the library. “I started the first Monday after graduation in June 1960,” Young said.

Besides Dudgeon and administrative assistant Marian Adams, the staff included Nancy Gilbert in the Children’s Room; Stella Salter at circulation; Susan Perrodin (Maez); Carol Helke (Chambers); and Jean Simkins.

The janitor was Arvid Kronholm, the cleaning lady, Esther Hoffman.

Soon, Dudgeon added Helen McKechnie, Mrs. Bevins, and Madalene Owens. “We got a reference librarian that had a degree in library science. I think Roberta Jensen worked here during the sixties and she got a masters degree.”

Young said the library office was in the present Museum gift shop.

To the left, now a wide doorway into the Grim Natwick exhibit, the then-closed door had provided a wall.

You could ascend the stairs to the Children’s Room or continue to the “dining room” where the circulation desk occupied space in front of the inactive fireplace.

Then, there was no wall between the dining room, now devoted to a display about the library, and the Natwick room, which held stacks for fiction and non-fiction. A card catalogue stood in the vicinity and a reference librarian was stationed by the bay window.

In the back “sun room” was a reading room with magazines and newspapers. What is now the cranberry history exhibit held more non-fiction and intermediate books.

“In back” where there is now a small office, teens sought privacy among older issues of magazines.

Upstairs, the present Country Store was one big children’s room. In what is now the toy room, clubs met and story hours were held.

In the second floor office, mending and cataloguing took place. Amenities included cookies in the closet and a hot plate over the register. After Kennedy’s assassination, Dudgeon allowed a radio to be brought in. “It was the best room with the best view,” said Young.

The local history file was also on the second floor. In the third-floor attic: the Tom Taylor history book.

In summer, the old library was hot. “No air conditioning; fans in every room. We did our summer reading program out in the back yard.”

Nevertheless, Young said, it was a cool place to work. “Every supervisor I had, I learned something from, and I had some really good supervisors. Of those, Kathy Engel would be number one.”

As she reflected on a career that began 47 years ago, Young said, “I was just a high school graduate; now I’m head of tech services. The library has been good to me.”

05-14-07

Botkin

Curiosity about the name, “Botkin,” caused me, 25 years ago, to start a file on a family I knew nothing about. That, and visits to my wife-to-be at Botkin Tripp hall, U.W.-Madison. Could there be a connection between the River City Botkins and the great University?

It was apparent that three brothers named Botkin were acquaintances of local *Wood County Reporter* editor Jack Brundage and/or the Reporter’s H.B. Philleo, who, as “P.P. Macaroni, Physician,” composed the “Spinal Column.”

From the *Reporter*...

March 3, 1860:

“Wood Co. Bank.—The Presidency of this institution has been assigned to Mr. L.P. Powers of this town. We learn that Mr. Botkin has resigned the Cashiership and that Mr. L.M. Hawley is to be his successor. The change has created considerable excitement here, it being distasteful to a majority of our business men.”

According to the 1860 census, 34-year-old Hawley was a married clerk born in Connecticut. His children had been born in New York as the family moved westward.

The Botkin referred to was probably William Wallace Botkin, enumerated in the 1860 census as “W.W. Botkin,” a 23-year-old banker with a personal estate of \$1,000, a large sum that implies wealthy parents.

June 2, 1860:

“Billiards.—A young gentleman who is universally known hereabouts by the

title of “Bot,” in the course of a game of billiards, the other day, found his ball near the ‘spot’ at the head of the table, while the remaining three lay near the right-hand side pocket, on which he caromed and “holed” two in that pocket and the other in the left-hand head one—thus making thirteen at one shot. It is the first time we ever saw it made during the progress of a game and we question whether it has ever been done before in the state.”

October 19, 1861.

“CLERK OF THE BOARD.—W.W. Botkin having been commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant of ‘The Evergreens,’ resigned his office of Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, and at a special meeting of the Board held on Saturday last, Mr. L.M. Hawley was chosen as his successor, who takes possession to-day.”

The Evergreens were volunteers in the Union Army.

Nov. 2, 1861:

“CLERK OF THE BOARD.—The question now agitating our people is, who is Clerk of the Board? Mr. Hawley claims to be and Judge Cate seems inclined to believe that he is; while other experienced and profound lawyers deny his claim, and assert that of Mr. Botkin.

“Force has been brought into requisition to oust Mr. Botkin. The other day, Mr. George Hiles, of Dexterville, accompanied by two others, forced from the hands of Botkin’s clerk the delinquent land book, and ‘packed’ it off.

“This mode of procedure is not strictly in accordance with either law or gospel.”

August 20, 1863:

“IN TOWN.—Capt. W.W. Botkin, of Co. G. 12th Wis. Reg., very unexpectedly made his appearance in town last Monday.

“Bott looks well and hearty—carries a stiff upper lip, and says Grant’s a trump. He has the same opinion of copperheads that a Christian has of Satan—the army ditto.

“He returns to his regiment after a short sojourn among his friends.

“If Bott ever becomes a prisoner to the Confeds, they will have a tough, as well as a very agreeable Captain.—We don’t look, however for any such change in Bott’s social status just yet.”

Soon, W.W. “Bott” Botkin was appointed lieutenant colonel of the 42nd regiment.

As an army colonel, the story goes, Bott found himself in New Orleans, where antagonism ran high between officers of the army and navy, the latter assuming superior rank and social quality.

At a tavern or similar establishment, when Colonel Botkin vacated his seat, probably to look for the rest room, a naval officer sat in his place. When Botkin returned, the navy man insolently refused to surrender the chair. He didn’t seem to know that all the Botkin men possessed unusual physical strength and was no doubt nonplussed when “Bott” reached over, took the sailor by the collar, threw him over his head into the aisle and took his seat, while the naval officer retreated from the building.

05-28-07

Essence of Gil

All day I listened to him, not knowing he had already died: Gilbert Mead, one of the best friends this town will ever have. Gilbert's distinctive voice was preserved on tape, thanks to Kelly Lucas, who had asked me to interview him for the Community Foundation of South Wood County.

The first conversation, March 9, 2006, was by phone; Gilbert had been treated for throat cancer and might not travel here again. In discussion and in a visit at Hotel Mead, July 27, 2006, I wondered how Gil had come to care for Wisconsin Rapids, where he had lived only his first dozen years. Why had he given a generous part of a fortune and reserve of precious personal energy on our behalf?

Was it for "Gompy?"

Gompy, Gil's grandfather, George Mead I, had built the Consolidated paper company and our fair city into world class operations. When young Gil came down with scarlet fever, followed by rheumatic fever, he lay in bed all summer. To pass time, he multiplied number in his head with such skill that the usually-reserved grandfather beamed with pride.

Almost every Sunday, the extended family gathered at First Congregational Church, followed by chicken dinner at the nearby Island with George I and "Gommy", his wife, Ruth, providing "the opportunity to always know we would be with family," said Gil.

Were his good works for his grandpa or did Gil do it for "Dada?" His father, Stanton Mead, was "Dada"(dah-dah), George I's successor who preserved the prosperity and reputation of Consolidated Papers, Inc. No one was more devoted to Wisconsin Rapids than Stanton, a multi-millionaire when that meant something. Yet, when he trekked from the west side mansion that had been a gift from his father, to the Elks Club, he asked for no more than to be one of us.

Was it for his family or was it a tribute to a small town boyhood that included regular Sunday school and Boy Scouts? Gil's Eagle badge eluded him only because he left for Hotchkiss, a private school. In a favorite image, the young entrepreneur tows his wagon down First Avenue, hauling vegetables harvested from his father's garden for sale to neighbors.

Was it the community or was he moved by fun with pals? Hiding in the barn to smoke straws filled with coffee; riding around Ninth Avenue with Herb Dittmann; or joining Kent Dickerman for skiing at Rib Mountain. "We were able to make fast friends and do all kinds of things together," Gil said.

Or maybe the good feelings came from Lowell school; Gil lived close enough to come home for lunch. At Lowell, he enjoyed a rivalry with Anna Carol Kingdon, the congregational minister's daughter. The fact that I felt deeply immersed in the local elementary school was very meaningful to me," he said, rising to the challenge posed by memories of Anna Carol:

1-2-3-4-5-6-7

All good children go to Heaven.

When they get there, they all yell

L-o-w-e-l-l.

Did his attachment have something to do with music? Gil always had a knack for playing piano by ear. For Travel Class, the dutiful son had to come out and play piano because his mother wanted to show off his ability. He enjoyed singing with various groups while attending school in Wisconsin Rapids.

Certainly, he had thought about it, the back and forth legacy: "What it meant to be Gilbert Mead, son of Stanton Mead, as one of my age, in addition to George and Mary, my brother and sister, growing up in Wisconsin Rapids; it didn't bother me. I kept thinking it must have made me feel very much an outlaw in a sense, of not being really a part of a community, and not have an opportunity to have friends because, after all, I was this rich kid that lived at 730 First Ave S.; it never occurred to me."

To call Gilbert Mead a "philanthropist" may be apt, if that means a benefactor with big pockets, a friend at heart and a sentimental soul who, by our good luck, grew up here.

He said he owed it to his family and community, "to give back in terms of my time and my energy and my resources to support what has meant so much and I've never regretted it."

"That's Gil then?" I asked, at the end.

"That's Gil," he said. "You got the essence of Gil."

06-04-07

Butch

My classmate Butch had a party the other day. It was a good one, like you would expect from a guy who lived “la dolce vita.”

He laid out a sumptuous buffet and a bar with *beaucoup* beer, wine and cocktails. His guest list included friends, family, co-workers, contemporaries, lawyers like himself, judges, several favorite bartenders and maybe a couple drunk drivers he had represented in court.

Especially for Class of '63 members present, on display was a story I had written following a Lincoln high class reunion. The last line came from Gary Kickland, who wrote in my freshman yearbook, “Dave, it has been nice knowing you but I hope I don’t have to see you again.” Butch and I didn’t operate that way.

In high school, Butch was a big man on campus, albeit an amiable one proud of his senior inscription: “A good guy full of fun; always nice to everyone.”

I had first seen him from afar, when I was a bench warmer for the Grove school basketball Pirates. Butch, having reached full height ahead of his pals, played on the A Team for Howe, then the slick kids’ school. A year later, I remember Butch and the freshman football team clattering past Lincoln high school field house, while I sat on my cornet case and waited for the school bus. Seemed like some called him, “Losh.”

Butch was also one of our pubescent political pundits. In 1961, he excoriated history teacher, Mr. “Wild Bill” Miller, for the fiasco perpetrated by Democratic

President John F. Kennedy at the Bay of Pigs.

Butch was what we of the Sand Hill saw as a rich kid, living *la dolce vita* on Third Street, though technically his address was Riverwood Lane. How impressed I was, at a time when traffic on the river was novel, that he took me in his “speedboat” up to Rapids.

“Why wouldn’t I?” he said when I asked him later. Didn’t I know he was full of fun, nice to everyone?

After Butch blew out a knee playing football, his life changed and, though underage, he was soon running a tab at Coney Island bar in Plover. No coincidence that his attempt at the dreaded senior “mile run” was memorably inept.

According to another clipping posted for this year’s party, Butch and I both graduated from Point college with honors. Indeed, though he was already married with child, Butch and I met occasionally at Little Joe’s bar where he continued to expound on issues of the late 1960s.

A few years later, at a town picnic in Milladore, there was Butch, campaigning for office by shaking hands with kraut eaters and bussing Bohunks of all ages.

During his four years as district attorney of Wood County in the mid 1970s, he busted a lot of pot smokers, maybe too many. His political career ended with a failed bid for a state senate seat.

Somewhere in our timeline came the ten-year class reunion. Butch had a party afterwards at which he performed a convincing imitation of the world’s

oldest man; we could see our futures in him. But he stopped aging at a relatively pleasing maturity and regained, as one female guest stated publicly, the qualities of a “hunk.”

When I had asked for an interview, Butch claimed, “A lot of people know more than I do” but, at our 40-year class reunion, despite sailing several sheets to the proverbial Elks Club wind, he answered the most questions in the trivia contest.

At his big pink house last year, Butch, who had quit smoking, continued to sip vodka as he told me how his family had come to town in 1956 and how everything went pretty well for him except his mother died when he was in high school. That was a tough one; but after that, though underage, he got special permission from Rapids police chief Rudy Exner to drive a car.

“You gotta try this cheese,” he insisted and told me the whole story of each variety: aged, dry, perfect. *La dolce vita*. At the Grand Avenue Tavern, which he showed up at regularly though he could hardly swallow, he said, “I want to show them I’m not dead.” Always a hard worker, he didn’t want to lose the business.

But then the problem was in the liver and he started planning one last party. Harold “Butch” La Chapelle, 61, died May 5, 2007, at Riverview Hospital in Wisconsin Rapids.

Thanks for the boat ride, old pal. You didn’t forget us; and we don’t forget you.

06-11-07

French Connection

Our oldest Catholic church, SS. Peter and Paul, marks its sesquicentennial as a parish a year after the Wood County “150” party. The actual origins of SSPP, like the county, were another 20 or more years earlier, taking us back to the 1830s and 40s.

Many of the first to arrive here were French-Canadians with names that included Cotey, LaBreche, Trudell, Arpin, Dugas, Lefebvre, Chevelier, Ver Bunker (Verboncoeur), Grignon, Homier, Voyer Rocheleau, Borgeron and Corriveau. Primarily Catholic, these French were able to celebrate mass in their tents and log cabins at least once a year, courtesy of traveling priests such as the indomitable Dutchman, Father T.J. Van den Broeck of Little Chute. The 1907 “Golden Jubilee: St. Peter and St. Paul Catholic Church” told how, in the early days, parents waded through mud and snow for miles when a priest was in town to attend mass or have their children baptized.

A real Catholic church was built in 1854, on what was later named 3rd Avenue. It was set on fire by Christmas decorations and was destroyed.

Next was the building that became SS. Peter & Paul. When SSPP priest John Peter Pernin, a Frenchman, wrote in Latin a sketch of the congregation, he said there lived on the east side a good, rich and generous Canadian, named Francis Biron.

Biron and a majority of the church members thought it advisable to build

a new church on the Grand Rapids side and this was done. The “mission,” previously served from Green Bay, Stevens Point and other established churches, thus became a “parish” with its own resident priest, the Rev. James Stehle. When a church was built, Rev. A.J. David finished the inside and had a small residence erected.

There followed a decade when a series of pastors visited.

Important to French such as Biron, the Society of St. John “the Baptiste” was organized in 1875. The group had originated in Canada when the ruling English tried to abolish the French language. In Grand Rapids, it was purely a social and benevolent society known for parades on the 24th of June.

The St. John society met for 14 years and included some additional French names: Berard, Biron, Boucher, Briere, Frechette, Lambert, Lavigne, Lavique, Martin, Meunier, Pomainville, Primeau, Pinsonneault, Rattel, Thibodeau, St. Amour.

Sermons for the 1907 Jubilee ceremony were delivered in French, German and English accompanied by programs at the opera house that included a whistling solo and a speech by Judge J.A. Gaynor, “The Past Fifty Years.”

At the time of the Jubilee, the pastor was Rev. William Reding, a Luxembourg native who had grown up in Minnesota and would stay at SSPP for more than three decades. Reding had been pastor at Eau Galle, Wis., in western Wisconsin, where he remodeled and enlarged the church and built a residence.

He was credited with organizing a parish at Plum City, Wis. and building new churches at Spring Valley, Colby and Abbotsford before being “suddenly” transferred in 1906 to Rapids.

Another foreign-born priest here was Charles Beyerle, who was born in Strasburg, which was then French. He had served at Duck Creek and Mariette, Wis. When Beyerle died in 1897, the cortege to Calvary cemetery was so long the Catholic Knights and Foresters at the head had almost reached the burial ground before the last carriage left the church.

Beyerle had followed, in the autumn of 1875, a priest who had come here from a situation of high peril: Rev. Peter Pernin, who had written the Biron passage mentioned above. What happened to Pernin? Find out next week.

But for today’s benediction, consider the words of Louis A. Bauman, secretary of the 1907 SSPP committee on arrangements. “Fifty years have rolled by. To glance backward the time seems but as yesterday. The past teaches us its valuable lessons. Much has been attained, but more remains to be done. New conditions demand renewed efforts.

“Our next Jubilee should show even greater progress; not only materially but spiritually.”

And so it is that we surpass jubilees and celebrate centennials, sesquicentennials, sometimes even a bicentennial and whatever comes after that.

06-18-07

Pernin

When the Grand Rapids Catholic church was struck by lightning, the priest may have thought he was under a bad sign. According to the 1923 *History of Wood County*, Father P. Pernin “took charge” of SS. Peter & Paul here in the autumn of 1875 and, sometime during his two or three years here, the storm damage occurred.

While stationed in Rapids, Pernin also built a church for the new St. Philomena parish on what is now 5th Avenue, town of Rudolph.

The life of John Peter Pernin was an active one. He was born 2-22-1822 in France and ordained there in 1846. Called in 1865 to be pastor of French-speaking L’Erable [Maple], Ill., he also ministered to nearby missions at Clifton, Chebanse and Gilman.

In 1869, Pernin transferred to Oconto, Wis., a French-Canadian enclave, and shortly, to nearby Marinette and Peshtigo, Wis., where the 1870 census notes he is a 45-year-old Catholic priest from France with a \$500 personal estate and a Belgian housekeeper.

Then came the coincidence that made Pernin a household word in select circles. On Oct. 8, 1871, came two great natural catastrophes. Most famous: the Chicago fire.

The other, “Peshtigo” fire, destroyed settlements and farms on both sides of Green Bay, over a thousand persons. The best account of the fire was written by Rev. Pernin himself: “The Finger of

God Is There! or Thrilling Episode of a Strange Event Related by an Eye-Witness, Rev. P. Pernin, United States Missionary, Published with the Approbation of His Lordship the Bishop of Montreal” (Montreal 1874). Pernin tells of the “hurricane” driven fire that destroyed Peshtigo and razed his other, more important, new church at Marinette.

He wrote the book, Pernin said, to raise funds to rebuild, which he did: Our Lady of Lourdes, a combination chapel and school, said to be incorporated in Marinette Catholic Central high school.

Although Pernin was saved by immersing himself in the Peshtigo river, the trauma landed him in St. Louis, recovering. Adding irony to injury, his ordination papers were destroyed in the other, Chicago, fire.

The insult followed, in 1874, when Pernin was forced to deny he had “embezzled” funds raised in St. Louis for the Marinette church, on the grounds that the \$2,000 had been meant for him personally.

Pernin returned to the diocese of Green Bay and a Bailey’s Harbor, Wis., assignment. In autumn 1875, he arrived in Grand Rapids.

In 1877, he went to La Crescent, Minn., where the 1880 census finds him, at 57 years old, a practicing “Reverend Clergyman.”

The May 5, 1963, *Winona News* names Pernin as the first resident priest at La Crescent 1877-1886; he also “attended” Houston, Minn.

At La Crescent, Pernin kept his financial accounts in the baptismal records.

On Dec. 28, 1882, Pernin said he had blessed a 304-pound bell for the La Crescent church.

In 1885, he was associated with La Crescent, Hokah convent, Hokah village, Houston and Ridgeway. Two years later, he was at Brownsville, also “attending” Dakota Holy Cross and Jefferson St. Patrick.

From St. Bridget church in Simpson, in 1895, he attended High Forest and Stewartsville. In 1898, Pernin was located at St. Joseph’s Church, Rushford.

Meanwhile, in 1889, St. Mary’s hospital opened in Rochester, Minn., and became associated with the Mayo clinic. The 1905 Rochester census says “Father Pernin,” 83, “resident priest” at St. Mary’s, lived at West Zumbro. He was 28 years in Minnesota and eight in the “district.”

From, “A Souvenir of Saint Mary’s Hospital”:

“With the increasing number of patients, the duties of the chaplaincy became very onerous, and after 1894 it was necessary to have a priest stationed at the hospital continuously. Very Reverend Pernin, vicar-general of the diocese....was the first regularly appointed resident chaplain and held the office from April 1, 1897, until his death, October 9, 1909.”

Pernin, 87, SS. Peter & Paul priest and chronicler of the Peshtigo fire, was buried in Calvary Cemetery, Rochester, Minn.

06-25-07

Pip Botkin

Remember “Bott” Botkin, who bade good-bye to battle Breckinridge, Butler and Beauregard? But how about Bott’s baby brother Pip?

Indeed, Pip is both revealed and concealed among the punishingly-playful words of the *Wood County Reporter* of Grand Rapids, Wis.

June 14, 1862:

“GONE FROM US.—Alexander the little, alias ‘Pip’ alias Botkin, returned to Madison last Tuesday to see his mother. Alec is a friend of ours. He’s a bully boy, appreciates a joke, and sometimes perpetrates some poor ones, which we are bound (by mutual agreement) to encore, as fast as perpetrated.

“Alec has been studying law—i.e., admiring Blackstone, criticizing Chitty on Contracts [a legal book], and re-revising the Wisconsin Statutes.—all of which explains how he happened to swindle the Wisconsin Stage Co. out of a dollar, by making Old Grace believe he was a boy, and therefore entitled to ride for half fare. Alec’s a bad chap for Old Law to fool with, ain’t ye, Pip? ‘Aye, bully.’ Alec’s a brick.

“He sometimes officiated as one of the editorial corpse of the *Reporter*, while we ‘run’ the Spinal [Column] and between us both we educated the public in all matters pertaining to political economy and home morality.—

“We hope Alec will return. We think he will. We once had an old pewter quarter that went from us, but we lived to see it return but little changed in aspect, the poor eagle excepted.

“Now, we’ll wager a codfish, big enough for all practical purposes, that that same Alec will make his mark in the world, before another generation shall have passed away. Alec, here’s our [hand pointing]. We shall watch thy rising.”

A fond Grand Rapids farewell to Alexander Campbell “Pip” Botkin, who joined his brother, W.W. “Bott” Botkin, in the Union Army.

March 26, 1863:

“Departure Extraordinary.—

“Pip, alias ‘Botkin the Titman,’ who has been sojourning in our midst the past week, having a presentment that his mother wanted him, took his departure for Madison via Wausau last Tuesday. ‘Pip’ was got up regardless of expense expressly for Dickens’ great story of ‘Great Expectations.’

“‘Pip’ is exceedingly astute—a lover of fun, exhilarating beverages, and nice girls; but with all his excellent qualities and natural gayety of spirits, he presents to the world the strange anomaly of a lover of fun who never laughs. To tickle his smeller with a straw, will occasionally create a smile; but he prefers the straw “a little lower,” with a mug at the other end.

“Then he smiles—so beautifully! ‘Pip,’ adjew!”

The next entry brings together in a paragraph all three Botkin brothers.

April 23, 1863:

“We see that W.W. Botkin, the cashier of the Wood Co. Bank, is Captain of Co. G., 12th regiment. S.W. Botkin, a brother, is commissioned as Captain

of Co. A, 23rd regiment.—‘Pip’ Botkin, ‘the elder brother,’ is patriotically serving his country at a ‘thousand a year’ as paymaster’s clerk.

So, off went the three Botkins to the most bloody conflict this country has ever known. Then what?”

A few years later, more items were picked up by the local newspaper. A reunion of the graduates of the University of Wisconsin residing in Milwaukee included one of our friends.

July 23, 1874:

“They had just cart loads of toast, we judge,” said the *Wood County Reporter*, punning on the word, “toast.”

“Our old time companion, Alec C. Botkin, who maketh the *Sentinel* now-a-days, went for it under the guise of saying something about his cherished Alma Mater, and then all the rest of the chaps laden down with Greek and Latin and good appetites went for what was left after Alex had done...”

Oct. 1, 1874:

“We acknowledge a pleasant call from A.C. Botkin, Editor of the Milwaukee *Sentinel*, during the convention.

“Alec’s photograph keeps well; we don’t see that it has materially changed since the days when it was custom in this northern country to scale an ‘eight feet’ tight-board fence in mid-winter, at midnight in woolen socks, and to hunt up the boots in the morning.”

The playful Pip had already left behind youthful pranks for a life of importance and would move forward to enjoy his share of abject misfortune.

07-02-07

3 Botkins

In the first rank of colorful names who have passed through our fair city were the Botkins.

There was Pip, the budding journalist of Grand Rapids (and later, Milwaukee) who went off to the Civil War. Born in 1842, Alexander Campbell Botkin had graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1859, prior to his arrival “up north.” After helping save the Union, Pip was appointed marshal for the territory of Montana, writing to his brother, Sinclair, that there were no petty thieves in his prison; they were all murderers, bandits and desperados.

With a posse of U.S. soldiers, Pip, as marshal, was sent after some unruly “Indians” in mid-winter and had to pass over high mountains. During a severe blizzard, exposure to cold caused an injury to his spine and rendered him unable to walk thereafter. At Helena, Mont., Pip practiced law from a wheelchair, ran unsuccessfully for Congress from Montana territory in 1882 and served as Republican lieutenant governor of Montana after its 1889 admission as a state.

Later, he continued to ply the trade of law in Chicago and died in 1905 while in Washington D.C. to revise the federal statutes. Pip is buried in Madison, Wis.

The question I posed at the start of the Botkin epic: was there a connection with the Botkin portion of Tripp hall on the UW-Madison campus? Indeed. Pip was namesake of “Botkin” residence

hall, at which I visited my wife, Kathy, then a graduate student, and after which I named a Sheltie dog, Bonnie Botkin.

Then there was Pip’s brother, William Wallace “Bot” Botkin. The 1860 federal census shows Bot in Grand Rapids, residing at the Wisconsin Hotel. At an early age, he had been employed by a bank at Grand Rapids, Wis., “then a new place,” where he, according to accounts, showed remarkable clerical ability. While yet a lad, Bot was required to take a large amount of gold between the bank at Grand Rapids, a frontier town, and banks at Madison. With no railroads, he had to travel on horseback to Portage City through what seemed to Madison folks an almost unbroken forest.

After the Civil War, Pip, the Montana marshal, younger by two years, appointed brother Bot as warden of the Deer Lodge, Mont., territorial prison, where he was in 1880.

Bot himself had an infirmity which developed into epilepsy, no doubt aggravated by his exposure during his army and frontier years. He was eventually admitted to the National Home for soldiers at Milwaukee, Wis., where he died in 1914.

Bot had not married and was the last Botkin to survive.

A third and oldest brother, Sinclair Walker Botkin, born 1838, was called by a college roommate, “Old Bot.” He became a state librarian and was deputy clerk of the state supreme court when he enlisted for the Civil War. Later, he was U.S. assessor, assistant U.S.

marshal, and a lawyer in Minneapolis, where he died in 1893.

Old Bot had studied at the University of Wisconsin with William F. Vilas, who, like all the Botkins, had gone off to the Civil War.

According to “Joe,” a college friend, “Old Bot,” may have saved Joe’s life. During a “high old time,” someone stood in the middle of the room singing while Joe hung out the window, hanging by his finger tips to the window sill. Another “friend” attempted to loosen Joe’s fingers but Old Bot rushed to the rescue and pulled Joe back into the room, enabling Joe to write, in a memoir, “Young men thought all old men were fools while all old men knew that young men were.”

Then there’s the father I will call “Ancient Bot,” Alexander Botkin Sr., who had come to Madison as assistant secretary of state under the Territorial government. A Whig, like Bob Wakely, he was a lawyer and member of the Wisconsin state senate and assembly in the 1840s and 1850s. He died in 1857—before his sons came to Rapids.

Ancient Bot had come from Alton, Ill., where the well-known Rev E.P. Lovejoy published an anti-slavery “Abolition” paper, an act Botkin deplored as incendiary. Ancient Bot acted as jury foreman at one of the Alton proceedings despite that fact that he had been hit by buckshot along with other rioters in 1837, against Lovejoy, who was killed while guarding a new press.

07-09-07

Dead Poet Society

Best history is written in stone; it will last forever. OK, not forever a couple million years or so, if the tablet is of Barre granite.

In Late June, on the road to Swampscott, I visited, in this order, the following cemeteries:

Witter Hill, Brookfield township, N.Y.

Warned not to trespass by our guide, Harold Witter of the Brookfield Witters, we viewed from a distance property once owned by forebears of the River City Witters. Harold showed us the thicket, high on the scenic landscape, that held five family gravestones — above one of a succession of Witter farms that spread from east to west.

Brookfield/Leonardsville, N.Y.

At the side of a rural highway, buried in the 1850's, were sisters, of "our" Josiah Witter and aunts of Jere.

West Cemetery, Amherst, Mass.

A bare patch of ground signaled the altar at which poetry-lovers appreciated Emily Dickinson, who "could not stop for death."

I went to Thank Her –

But She Slept –

Her Bed – a funneled Stone –

With Nosegays at the Head and Foot

That Travellers – Had thrown –

Burial Hill, Plymouth, Mass.

The old wooden markers have rotted. But rocks laid down in the late 1600s mark the resting place of many a Pilgrim.

Granary Burying Ground; Kings Chapel and Cemetery; Copps Bury-

ing Ground, all in Boston, Mass, on the brick-laid pathway called the Freedom Trail. Here lie founding fathers such as Sam Adams and John Hancock.

Old Burying Point, Salem, Mass.

Convicted witches, memorialized by later residents were originally hanged and dumped in a ditch, unfit to associate with the corpses of Holier-than-Thou.

Edson, Lowell

A patch of bare ground like that seen earlier at Amherst, at which visitors, some kneeling have embellished writer Jack Kerouac's flat ground-level slab. Cigarettes, beer bottles and scraps of paper are left for the author of *On the Road*.

Sleepy Hollow, Concord, Mass.

On Authors Ridge, handsomely-arranged pine cones accent the graves of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Emerson, Alcott and the rest of the transcendental crew. A couple miles down the road, granite posts stand unattended at the corners of Thoreau's Walden Pond cabin site while thousands of bathers throng the public beach.

Old Witter Farm, Hopkinton, R.I.

With a map provide by the "cemetery lady" at the town hall and directions from an Internet site, it was found off a dirt trail on private property, surrounded by poison ivy covered by blackberries. The most central and only standing stone bore the even-more familiar name: Josiah Witter (There were more than one.)

Oak Grove, Ashaway, R.I., and First Hopkinton, R.I.

Witters but not "our" Witters.

Schoharie, N.Y.

The typically hillside cemetery behind the museum-house was built by early Palatines, bearing German names instead of the usual English.

Kirtland, Ohio.

With the old Latter Day Saints temple in the background, here can be found kinsperson of the Puritans and Baptist buried in Massachusetts.

Beaverville, Ill., formerly "St. Marie."

Adjacent to the remarkable Cathedral-like church, French names recall the service of Father P.P. Pernin in the 1860s, who had also baptized a few citizens of our own River City and was featured here during my absence.

Cobleskill, N.Y.

After all is said and done, the deepest impression was made by the secluded hillside cemetery behind the house of my old pal Jim Nuhlicek (formerly of Wisconsin Rapids).

My first visit, in daylight, was friendly enough that I wanted to come back. The second was around midnight. To my surprise, I was just far enough in to be surrounded by the anonymous Cobleskill dead, when something big, shapeless, momentous and thoroughly terrifying seemed to rise up—like a cloud of bats representing the eternal souls of all human kind above and beneath the earth.

OK, not "eternal souls," but something just as scary. Believe me, I couldn't get out of that one fast enough.

07-16-07

Soldier Pip

You have heard a great deal about the Botkins, who lived here before the Civil War sent them packing. When Pip, a journalist, wrote back to editor Jack Brundage at a Rapids newspaper, the editor called his letters "Pip's 'Diary North and South!'" Thus they become part of the greatest trove of historical correspondence, Civil War letters, this country has known and are reproduced here pretty much as originally printed, beginning Aug. 6, 1863.

"June 20.—The hurried coming and going of orderlies to and from Regimental Head Quarters, and the whispered consultations of field officers, which had attracted my attention on the previous evening suggested to me that some military movement of importance might be anticipated. I was not disappointed.

"At 4 o'clock this morning, our whole line opened its artillery and poured a perfect shower of missiles into the rebel works. You can easily imagine that the noise was not long in arousing me from my slumber on the canes which constituted my couch....

"Every sound which the human voice is capable of producing had its appropriate representative issuing from the deep-mouthed cannon. The tones of the 81-pound mortar on the far right, breaking upon my ears like a deep moan mingled with the shriek from an adjacent battery of Parrott guns, until both were lost in the booming which proceeded from the entire line, while a cloud of smoke, war's stern incense, arose and shut out the rebel fortifications from

sight. So many cannon, each fired with the greatest possible rapidity, left not a second of interval, but kept up a continuous roar."

"From our Correspondent 'Pip'

"Baton Rouge, La., Nov. 20, 1863

"Dear Jack,—During the month which has transpired since I last wrote, I have been much tossed about, like Virgil's hero of old.

"On the 27th ult. I got on the cars at Algiers, the village opposite New Orleans, and proceeded to Brashear City. Here I got on a steamer and rode through Burwick Bay into Bayou Teche.

"I don't know how to describe this stream. I have too much respect for Four-Mile Creek to compare it to that. It is no wider, but so deep as to be navigable. The water is, in many places, entirely covered from sight by a vegetable which grows on top. It is a perfect Eden for alligators, and both banks exhibited specimens of that amphibious animal, with their open countenances, submitting their tough hides to the genial influences of the solar rays, and apparently enjoying a delicious, self-complacent reverie most enviable.

"The land around this Bayou is very rich, and many fine plantations adorn its banks...

"I arrived at Opelousas [La.] on the evening of the 31st. Early on the following morning, our army here and beyond commenced falling back. I went with it, and then for the first time understood what it is for an army to move. To stand in a large prairie and see a line of wagons and men, in either direction, as far as

the eye can reach, is a most suggestive prospect. And then, when they went into camp, how magically does that prairie become transferred into a city of tents. Notwithstanding the almost inconceivable rapidity with which these tents are put up, the whole camp is formed with as perfect regularity as if laid out with the aid of chain and compass...

"Having now finished the payment of our assignment; we returned to the Landing in an ambulance. Now, riding in an ambulance through this country is not unlike charging a secesh [secessionist] battery as far as danger is concerned.

"But the mules, happily, are generally equal to the emergency. They will draw safely a heavy load down a descent which a horse can scarcely be induced to attempt when only encumbered with his rider.

"In passing through this section, one has ample opportunity to notice the devastation which this war is bringing upon the South.—Beautiful houses, which had so lately been the seat of domestic joys, were now entirely deserted, or inhabited only by desolate females whose husbands, fathers and brothers were suffering the privations and dangers of a soldier's life within the doomed city of Vicksburg. Gardens, showing in their decay their former beauty and luxuriance, had been allowed to run to waste or were trod down by our soldiers. How have the crimes of this people brought their retribution to every heart and to every home!

"Pip."

07-23-07

Natwick from Hollywood

Grim Natwick: one of the most-mentioned names from Wisconsin Rapids history, in part because of the exhibit devoted to him at the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum, 540 Third St. S., and the many mentions in the *Daily Tribune*.

The movie “animator,” creator of Betty Boop, was also a sagacious commentator on living, here and elsewhere. On June 27, 1936, Grim, whose given name was Myron, was home for the golden wedding anniversary of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Natwick.

According to the *Tribune*, after more than five years in Hollywood, the motion picture capital of the world, Natwick was “not sorry he laid down his palette and oils to become identified with the business – art, rather – of creating those fascinating strips of celluloid we view on the screen, animated cartoons.”

In Natwick’s view, “[Hollywood is] a glamorous storybook kind of place full of make believe set down in a gorgeous land of semi tropical beauty and inhabited by people no better nor worse than any of us even though possessed of more beauty and more money, people who must live always up to the ideas their ‘public’ has of them whether on the set or off.” But, said Natwick, it is a place where people work a lot harder than most of us, in the *Tribune*’s wording, “hinterlanders.”

Natwick’s “brief talk” of Hollywood and motion pictures included “the sin-

cere attempt to portray the realities of the picture industry which lie underneath the publicity glare,” said the *Tribune*. And if “Hollywoodians” play, they work, too, at the absorbing task of creating amusement for the screen constantly nearer the artistic ideal. And that, Natwick’s manner showed, “was enough for any artist.”

Myron had been dubbed “Grim” in his youth by a companion, “Hank” Wasser, who made it his goal in life to nickname people. Natwick’s work with pen and pencil had begun early, he explained, as he “ruefully” recalled the Indian head motif that graced the cover of the Lincoln high school *Ahdawagam* yearbook of 1912. “I was proud of that then.”

After graduation from Lincoln, Natwick studied at the Chicago Art Institute, National Academy of Design, New York, and, after World War I, the Royal Academy in Vienna.

Back in New York, he became interested in short animations or cartoon movies. Around 1920, doing all the drawing himself, he made 22 comedies, such as “The Katzenjammer Kids” and “Silk Hat Harry.”

Natwick attempted to make a living with “fine art” until the Depression hit when he returned to cartooning. Walt Disney had by then begun making talking cartoons though Natwick joined Max Fleischer studios in New York, where he produced “Popeye” and “Betty Boop” films.

Hollywood work began in 1930 with Ub Iwerks’ animated “Flip the Frog”

and “Willie Whopper.” In 1934 he joined Walt and Roy Disney. In preparation at the time of the 1936 *Tribune* story, was “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” It would take another year to make, added to the year and a half already in process and would be the first full-length animated feature.

While in Rapids, Natwick said Jeannette MacDonald would be the actress he would select if he were to paint the most beautiful of Hollywood’s stars, with Loretta Young a close second. “They have gotten away from beauty, pure and simple. The actress as a woman is what counts.” Notable examples of female personalities were “Garbo” and Katherine Hepburn.

According to Natwick, stars had to keep up the illusion the public created around them. There were too many tourists and autograph hunters about to let them relax. “After living in Hollywood five years, one reduces his comments to wise-cracks directed at the weak spots in it rather than the strong ones. Read ‘Queer People’ [a satirical novel] if you want something close to the truth,” said Natwick.

He explained that there was more night life in Hollywood than River City, “because there is the greater urge to accented diversion,” brought on through exciting work for long periods at high tension and a consequent “release” when it was done.

07-30-07

Beaver

A beaver is more than a good-looking tail. Beginning in the 1600s, desire for its fur-covered skin or “pelt” sent traders paddling through-out the lakes and rivers of the Great Lakes basin for a couple-hundred years.

This busy dam rodent has been a recent obsession with me, having just returned from both Beaver Island and Beaverville. Blame it on former *Daily Tribune* ace Mark Scarborough, who had long touted the historical romance of Beaver Island, home of America’s only resident king, James J. Strang, self anointed successor to prophet Joseph Smith of the Latter Day Saints. He was, like Smith, a monarch bee to whom workers swarmed.

Being a Mormon nut, I wanted to view Strang’s kingdom. To this end, I took a two-hour ferry ride from Charlevoix, (Lower Peninsula) Mich., into the blue expanse of Lake Michigan. With me was a Rapids crew: my wife and daughter; friends Hugh and Carol Midor; brother Hebert and his son Dunlap; and a trombonist buccaneer dubbed Hawthorne Dellsbob.

The main historical attraction of the village of St. James was the Beaver Island Historical Society museum. The former print shop had furthered the ambitions of Strang, who seemed able to come up with an approving message from God whenever he wanted another wife. Nearby, was the spot where

Strang was gunned down in 1856, after which the Mormons left the Island to the buck-toothed rats.

More beaver action took place at Mackinac Island, which we visited next. For a couple hundred years, Wisconsin’s economy depended on the beaver muffs and hats of Europe. French-Canadian merchants traded useful and ornamented items of European manufacture for furs from their Native neighbors and in-laws. Thus, beaver pelts were carried by canoe to yet to-be-named River City down the Wisconsin and up the Fox rivers to Green Bay, then to Mackinac and on to Montreal.

By the early 1800s wild beavers had been depleted. One of the last fur traders was our own Amable Grignon.

The son of Pierre Grignon and Louise Delanglade was born at “La (Green) Baye,” in 1795. During the War of 1812, with capital from this venture, he joined with his brother, Hippolyte (Paul) Grignon, and worked the upper Wisconsin River.

Amable married Judith Bourassa in 1824 – in Mackinac County, where they lived in 1825.

By the 1840 federal census, he, with a household that included 16 adult males, was located in Portage County, along with the familiar Dubays, Whitneys and Wakelys. Amable died at Grand Rapids in 1845.

On Mackinac Island can be viewed a small cabin called the McGulpin house. Mrs. McGulpin was a Bourassa, like Judith Grignon. Perhaps the two en-

joyed a cup of tea in that house.

Other fur trade era buildings just down the hill from Fort Mackinac, now visited by tourists, were likely utilized almost 200 years ago by the Grignons.

After another history tour, I told you about Father Pernin, who had been priest of SS. Peter & Paul here. Surprisingly, he too had a brush with a beaver namesake. Pernin had come through the French community south of Kankakee, Ill., that included “Beaverville,” now the site of an impressive Catholic church I toured in July. Also to Beaverville came numerous French Canadians, including members of the Bourassa family.

Besides Mackinac Island, another “historic” site is located between lakes Michigan and Huron: the Mackinac bridge that was built 50 years ago to connect upper and lower Michigan. The very same day my friends and I were leaving the “LP,” the bridge was about to be closed for a celebratory parade. My dad would have stayed for the fireworks; he liked to see history being made.

Concluding my book, *River City Memoirs V*, is a snapshot of myself and my sister on a rocky shoreline. Rising out of the fog in the background, under construction, are the giant piers of the Mackinac, a bridge to the past and to the future.

08-06-07

Who Killed Mary Hogan?

Come November, will blow in the golden anniversary of the biggest news event ever to be datelined Wisconsin Rapids. Come November when my colleagues relive revelations that, 50 years ago, inspired Grandma to grab the apple pie from the window sill and lock the screen door.

Come November, when a few old men will tell how they were called from “gun deer” season to blood-sport of a third kind. Among the red-plaid brethren was my co-author Herbert A. Bunde, the judge, since deceased.

“You better get down here right away,” the voice on the phone said, so Bunde, like a lot of us, left Shanagolden for something darker.

Come November 1957, Bunde found out more than he wanted to know and, in spite of our morbid curiosity, so did we. In Novembers to come, Herbert A. Bunde was questioned but preferred to remain silent.

But the “other” judge, Robert H. Gollmar, of the circus family, was not so reticent. After an indecent interval, the affable raconteur autographed for me, in 1981, a more than candid book that included obscene photos originally meant as evidence not fit for viewing by the general public.

Wanting to do my job in a professional manner, I telephoned the last victim’s son to ask what he thought about the book; he hung up. I wish I hadn’t done it. Then, I contributed the story old ladies told me I shouldn’t have written—

not for the characteristic obscurity, but because I mentioned it at all.

Had I aspired enough to a widespread readership, I would have written not just a mild newspaper rehash but a full-length book; but my name would have been mud and my mother would have rolled over in her grave, had she been in it.

Dec. 8, 1954, Seymour Lester went from his farm to the nearby Hogan tavern home for the ice cream his daughter wanted. He found no one home and blood on the floor. What happened to the bar owner, Mary Hogan?

Ed Marolla, editor of the *Plainfield Sun*, wrote often about the disappearance and apparent murder of Mary Hogan. He also worried about a series of other crimes that caused “uneasiness and consternation” among the residents of southern Portage and northern Waushara counties. If Mary Hogan had been killed, who was the murderer?

Come early November 1957, an answer came from a stranger, an inmate at the Minnesota State Prison who “confessed” he had beaten to death the tavern owner. But he had not.

A couple weeks later, a friend, the real murderer, who sometimes told the truth, retraced the route he had taken three years earlier and showed where he had burned and buried parts of Hogan under an ash pile near his farmhouse.

About that time, November 1957, when I arrived for lessons at Grove school, the smart aleck Sand Hill kids were already enjoying the jokes that would sweep the nation.

“What did (the murderer) say to the sheriff who arrested him?”

“Have a heart.”

Come November 2007 at Mendota mental hospital, Madison, a few long term workers will remark about the meek little man who was no trouble at all. Come November, among the world-wide web, will be a fiesta of the macabre, a party for the nocturnal gnome I have been compared to because I admitted assassinating a few chipmunks.

Yes, if I am like *him*, I am the most perverted handyman who ever shuffled up the lane. I am a peeping-tom strutting and howling in the moonlight. I am liar, thief, nutcase, creep, sicko, slime. I am self-obsessed, narcissistic, necrophilic, sociopathic. I am the weirdo who gave weirdos and pork chops a bad name.

The authors with the books I thought of writing contributed more synonyms:

“America’s most bizarre murderer,” from Judge Gollmar

“Deviant,” by Harold Schechter in his book

“Psycho,” by Bloch and Hitchcock.

He inspired “Silence of the Lambs,” “Texas Chain Saw Massacre” and “Three on a Meathook.” He was “De-ranged” and “Maniac.”

Who, come November, killed Mary Hogan?

It wasn’t the usual ex-husband, lover, common thief or jealous wife. Around town, they called him, “Eddie.”

Who killed Mary Hogan?

It was Ed Gein.

08-13-07

A Grieved Community

Ed Gein still haunts a village that no more deserved him than did Dixon, Ill., Plains, Ga., Crawford, Texas, or Mayberry RFD.

Immediately after the offenses of November 1957, *Plainfield Sun* editor Ed Marolla spoke for the “shocked and grieved community that paid its last respects to one of their own”: Gein’s last victim, hardware store owner Bernice Worden. “Cast suddenly and reluctantly into the national and international spotlight by having one of the worst crimes in history committed in their midst, the people of Plainfield went about their business and did what had to be done. To the world outside, she [Mrs. Worden] was but a name to be talked of and remembered with horror—to the people of her community, a friend and neighbor whom they had known, liked and respected had passed away.

“We here at the SUN office, together with all the citizens of this area, join in offering our deepest heartfelt sympathy to the family of Bernice Worden your sorrow is the community’s own sorrow.

“The big city dailies, the radio and TV stations, have given you all the details of what has happened—and a lot of things that never happened. For our part, in this issue, we tried not to tell you the story as it was seen by the big city reporters—but as we ourselves saw it here in Plainfield. After all, the SUN was Mrs. Worden’s own home paper. We recorded over the years her little

social doings, the births of her grandchildren, the ads of her store.

“In July of 1956 we ran her photo and a little story on her, as our ‘Citizen of the Week.’ We recall how pleased she was at the time...”

And the little things: getting the ad from her each Monday morning, discussions of public affairs through her “pointed comments” and her fondness for her firstborn grandson.

Mrs. Worden, with her son, Frank, operated Worden Hardware and Implement Co., on one of Plainfield’s main business corners. The former Bernice Conover, born May 9, 1899, at Canton, Ill., came to Plainfield with her parents at age 12. She and her husband, Leon Worden, operated the store from 1920 until his 1931 death.

Following Gein’s arrest, on Sunday morning, Nov. 17, 1957, the citizens of Plainfield went to church, knowing there had been a murder, but “without knowledge of the horrible details.” As the story spread in the Sunday editions of the larger city papers, said Marolla, people in his village were shocked and stunned.

They also wondered about Mary Hogan who had disappeared three years previous from her Pine Grove tavern, leaving a similar pool of blood and evidence of a body being dragged. And wasn’t it so that Ed Gein had owned a bluish truck similar to the green truck in the Mary Hogan case?

As a bad-enough murder case evolved into one of the worst-ever crimes in history, said Marolla, news-

men and photographers swarmed into Plainfield from Milwaukee, Chicago, Minneapolis and St. Paul dailies; Associated and United Press; *Time*, *Life* and *Look* magazines; and from radio and TV stations.

A service was set up in the Union Telephone Co. to send photos by telephone and the SUN office was used as local headquarters by the urban journals. “Plainfield people got to see how big city reporters go about their work, and some of the things they did, people did not like.”

Marolla said he spent most of Monday afternoon trying to refute rumors as broadcasting stations all over the Midwest insisted lynch mobs were forming. More reasonably, Plainfield residents, still jittery after three years of the Mary Hogan case, “expressed resentment over any thought of not seeing the investigation completely through” and fear that Gein might “get by with an insanity charge,” to be out again in a couple of years.

As Mrs. Worden was laid to rest, her loved ones gathered at the Goult Funeral Home and later the Methodist church. Mrs. Clifford Tubbs, accompanied by Mrs. Albert Walter, sang, “Abide With Me,” and “What a Friend We Have In Jesus.”

Pallbearers were Albert Walter, Jesse Wood, Franklin Rothermel, Gyle Ellis, Jim Severns and Arden Spees. Interment was in the Plainfield cemetery beside the body of her husband.

08-20-07

Jesseca Penn

So what if a little old lady died in Plainfield 50 years ago? Found sitting in her chair at 7 p.m. by neighbors Mrs. Harvey Weymouth and Mrs. Walter Nelson, who had been kind enough to call on her each day. So what if she lived from 1881 until 1957, a mere 76 years, and was a member of the Plainfield Methodist church?

So her name was Jessica but she had taken to spelling it Jesseca. People of her type did that sort of thing.

So her last name was Penn and she claimed to be descended from William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania. (Old ladies take pride in their genealogy.)

A native of Des Moines, Iowa, Jessica/Jesseca Penn liked Plainfield so much that she moved there to spend her last nine years living quietly near the community park. Having retired in 1933, she came from Milwaukee in May of 1948. "I think Plainfield is a beautiful town and I like it here very much," she said.

Death was attributed by the physician at the scene to a heart attack. Jesseca's only survivors were three cousins in distant places.

According to her wishes, there were no funeral services. The body was taken by the Goult funeral home to Valhalla Crematory in Milwaukee. The ashes were interred at Wisconsin Dells rather than Plainfield, a good idea, with Ed Gein scanning the obits.

Over the years, the old lady made the Plainfield society column in the Stevens

Point and Wisconsin Rapids newspapers on numerous occasions.

In September 1948, it was noted that "Jessica Penn" "of Milwaukee" would spend the rest of summer and fall with Mrs. Ethel Townes, who had recently purchased a home in the village. Jesseca left Mrs. Townes in December 1948 to return to Milwaukee for the winter.

In October 1953, one of those gossipy blurbs recorded that Mrs. Van Sant, Mrs. Goult and Miss Delana Pratt attended Order of the Eastern Star at Milwaukee. Jesseca accompanied them and visited friends. Shortly after returning from Milwaukee, Mrs. Ray Goult took Jesseca to the Wild Rose hospital for a few days of treatments and a check up.

She continued to receive treatment for a heart condition at Wild Rose. In 1956, she was still traveling to Milwaukee to see "friends." But then, in the spring of 1957, she died and the story of the old lady's life seemed written considerably larger than expected.

There had been a clue eight years earlier. A notice for a Plainfield homecoming week art contest called for etchings, pen or pencil drawings, sculpture and wood carving—with a separate division for needlework and taxidermy. "Submit entrees to Jessica Penn."

Who the heck was Jessica Penn?

From the bright lights of theatrical stages in almost all of America, said newspaper accounts, to the quiet restfulness of a small Wisconsin community—that's the story of Jesseca Penn, once noted professional dancer and artist's model, who chose the small Waushara

community of Plainfield for her permanent home.

The same little old lady claimed to have posed for prominent painters and sculptors throughout the United States. "There isn't an art gallery or well known collection in the country that hasn't something of me," she told a reporter in 1949.

Busts and paintings of the model, it was said, could be found in the Louvre in Paris, the Chicago Institute of Art, the National Art Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

In the Assembly Chamber of the Wisconsin capitol is a 38-foot-wide mural by Edwin Howland Blashfield of New York. The painting itself has nothing to do with Jesseca Penn.

But in the Iowa capitol is another mural, "Westward Ho," also by Blashfield. Located between the first and second floors, it depicts the migration of early pioneers.

Posing in 1905 as the model for the central figure of Blashfield's mural was a little old lady who was young then, Jesseca herself.

Another famous painter, Robert Henri, enjoyed as his favorite model, the "Ziegfield Follies dancer," Jesseca Penn, who was a tall redhead with a thin waist, like a couple of his wives. Jesseca told Henri that she intended to become the greatest dancer in the world but to Henri the little old lady, he said, was simply, "one of the finest nudes I have ever seen."

08-27-07

Model Extraordinaire

Remember last week when the little old lady who died 50 years ago in Plainfield was revealed as a famous model? She was the main figure of the mural in the Iowa state capitol, having been chosen by artist Blashfield as the prettiest gal in the state.

She was the subject of numerous sculptures. She called herself “Jesseca” Penn and was called “Jessica,” in a so-named work by Louis Loeb, painted in 1905 when they may have been married. It is part of the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

She was “Jessica Penn in Black and White Plumes,” 1908, by Robert Henri, a leader of the Ashcan School in New York. It sold for \$3.6 million, a record for Henri.

She was baby Jessica, born June 1881 to 23-year-old Iowa native Alice Ayers Penn. Jessica’s father was 30-year-old George W. Penn, a clerk from Pennsylvania, who died the year of Jessica’s birth.

Widowed mother Alice remarried in 1888 to Charles B. Rounds. In 1900 Alice Rounds and Jessica B. Penn, then in school, and another daughter, Marie Rounds, lived with Alice’s parents Giovanni and Eliza Ayres in Des Moines.

Jessica started dance at age 5, much to the objection of her family, and went to New York at 16 to work as a model. At Miss Elley’s finishing school, she studied literature, concert, and “dancing culture.” She also was dancing professionally before she was 18.

Apparently, she married New York artist Louis Loeb about this time. She also studied at Chicago musical college and took ballet training.

In 1905, the Waterloo, Iowa, *Times Tribune* called her a “Poster girl Sensation,” when Jessica, “the girl he made famous,” married the editor of the Des Moines *Mail and Times*, Ralph W. Evans, at St. Joseph, Mich. If Evans’ former wife collapsed when told of the wedding, it was in part because she had introduced the two while still married to Evans.

The 1910 federal census shows Ralph W. Evans, 41, with his wife, Jessica, who is listed as 26, though she was actually 29. He was in the printing business and she was an actress “out of work” 20 weeks in the past year.

She had appeared as a dancer throughout the Midwest, specializing in pantomimic stories, “the newest thing.” Her rendition of a cabaret dance “was gracefully executed” but “not entirely in accord with the tastes of all in the audience.”

Yet, she was “the perfect wife” who, in 1927, clad in grey-brown fall coat and a black, broad-brimmed hat, “lips quivering and eyes filled with tears,” sued for divorce in Milwaukee, charging Evans with cruelty. The two had wed, said a contemporary account, June 18th, 1907. She said she was “40”; she was 46.

She still seemed to retain “a deep affection for the marriage explained so in detail in her book which made her popular as an author.” “We had many stones in our path,” she wrote, “to step over

and push away—my ambitions made me a difficult wife at first.”

But her legal complaint said for eight years Evans had pretty much ignored her and that they separated for a year-long matrimonial “vacation.” She said Evans didn’t return to their picturesque home at Fox Point in Milwaukee County for days at a time and said it was none of her business where he had been.

Evans followed Jessica to the witness chair and stated briefly that the property settlement as stipulated was agreeable to him.

Jesseca continued to perform after the divorce, spending, for example, the 1928 season in South Africa with the Padley Orkransky Russian Ballet.

Jesseca’s own act of 14 numbers began at the Milwaukee Art Institute and played at the Chicago Art Institute. Her West Coast tour in 1930 included Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland, Ore., and Seattle.

In the early ’30s, Jessica, or “Jesseca,” as she later preferred, began writing “Pinwheel,” an autobiography which she completed in 1938. Chapters of this book were serialized in a Milwaukee newspaper in 1942.

In the end, she moved to Plainfield, where she lived out her last years in relatively obscure peace and quiet.

09-03-07

Last Civil War Widow

The news report was wrong, said Mrs. Ben Sparks. The last Civil War veteran's widow was not dead. Mrs. Sparks knew that because, she said, she herself was the last Civil War veteran's widow, reporting in 1957.

The husband of Mrs. Ben Spark, whom she had married in 1912, oddly enough was named "Eugene" Sparks.

Eugene was a Civil War veteran who died in 1918 at the age of 75 and was buried in Forest Hill Cemetery here. At the time of their marriage, he was 69, and Mrs. Sparks-to-be was 19.

Born in Wyoming County, New York, Eugene Sparks had been discharged in 1865 from the New York Infantry volunteers. He settled in Wisconsin and worked in the logging and lumber business. According to Mrs. Sparks, her elderly first husband had 13 children by his first marriage (to Lydia Huff 1859-1903), five of whom were still living in 1957. Sometime after the death of Eugene, Mrs. Sparks married one of those children, his son, Ben.

It seems Ben Sparks was born in 1892 and was a year older than his stepmother become spouse. On the 1900 census, he was one of 10 children listed of Eugene and his first wife, Lila (Lydia), who had died in 1895(?).

The second Mrs. Sparks, named in the 1920 census is "Mary." At that time Ben was still her stepson; in 1930, she was called "Mayme" and he was listed as her stepson. Eugene and Mary, the second Mrs. Sparks, had three children,

of whom Mrs. Lloyd Knuteson was, in 1957, living in Wisconsin Rapids.

•In a story from 1946 that also turned up recently, another local veteran was profiled. Back on the job after World War II was Donald "Red" Blanchard, recently discharged from the Army after 45 months of service. He returned to former employer WFHR and could be heard at 11:30 each weekday morning on the Farm and Home hour.

While in the service, "Red" spent most of his time entertaining servicemen. His first assignment was at Fort Lewis, Wash., where he was featured as comedian on a number of shows. After 21 months at Fort Lewis, Blanchard was shipped to the Pacific where, for 25 months, he played the comedy lead in "Stars and Gripes," one of the largest Army shows organized during the war. "Red" also appeared before GI audiences at post theaters and was featured with smaller units sent into front lines at gun emplacements and field hospitals. He was honorably discharged in December 1945 at which time he held the rank of corporal.

•Another 1957 story featured the mother of a celebrity when Mrs. Jacob Friedrich, 79, formerly of Nekoosa, died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. J. Buckley, Love Street, Wisconsin Rapids.

Mrs. Friedrichs had been Amelia Gueldenzoph, born in Germany In Sheboygan Falls, she married Jacob Friedrich in 1895 and moved to Nekoosa, shortly after the community was founded. Amelia Gueldenzoph Friedrich was the mother

of Robert "Strangler Lewis" Friedrich, one of the best-known professional wrestlers in the world.

Another "50 years ago" story from the summer of 1957 featured Mrs. Proxeda Oberhuber who was sitting in the family auto while her husband Anton hooked a boat trailer to the vehicle at water's edge in on the north side of Lake Wazeecha.

Oberhuber called to his wife to pull the parking brake tighter because the 1950 model car was slowly slipping backward. But the parking brake handle slipped from her hand releasing entirely and the auto plunged into eight feet of water with the woman inside. Mrs. Oberhuber escaped through a door and swam to shore.

The vehicle was recovered after Carl Sharkey, a city police officer, donned his diving gear and attached a cable to the bumper, allowing a wrecker truck to pull the car out of the lake. On the scene assisting were officer Dave Sharkey and Undersheriff Donald Caylor.

You have read recently in these pages about Jesseca Penn, the famed model who retired to Plainfield. In 1957, a group of good lookers right here in River City convened for a *Daily Tribune* photo.

High school student models featured in a national advertising program by Consoweld Corp. included Nancy Natwick, Andy Fish and the precocious lad later renowned for thespian activities, the ever-handsome silver-coiffed and silver-tongued raconteur, Lou Abler.

09-10-07

Marsh Angels

By late November 1957, some of the crisis had quieted. Edward Gein, murderer and grave robber, had been taken to the state prison at Waupun for sanity tests. Plainfield no longer headlined the nation's newspapers though thousands of "morbidly curious" came to gawk at the scenes of crimes.

Residents attended Sunday morning church and mulled over editorials by Gordon Culver, formerly of Wautoma and Almond, that had appeared in the *New London Press*.

According to Culver:

"Western Waushara county as it melts into the 'dead heart' region of Wisconsin ... takes on a peculiar, lonely, wild feeling. A feeling of people struggling for subsistence. A feeling that an honest living is hard to come by in this throbbingly poor area...

"Off principal highways, where a few respectable farms are seen, there is nothing but marsh and cutover lands and more wilderness and desolation. In this back country a common term for its inhabitants is 'Marsh Angels.'

"And so, when this murder took place on the border of that netherland, it was something we'd suspect would take place. People seemed to have a disconcert about what other people, even their neighbors do. Their own struggles are sufficient for their capacities. And if something strange and odd takes place, it is much more likely to be accepted as their business and nobody else's."

But on Nov. 30, 1957, Franklin Otto, a New London native, counted Culver's negative portrayal. "Yes, I live in Plainfield, the town that has four churches in which to worship, the town that has an advancement association that packs 500 children's candy bags for Christmas and sponsors delegates to 'Trees for Tomorrow' and many other civic improvements. We have a Tri-County High School with students from the regions you talk of. We are proud of the students even if you call some 'Marsh Angels.'

Plainfield, said Otto, was the town with an American Legion Post that sponsored Junior Legion ball for 60 boys, where the Lions Club worked to give teen age dances, provided an outdoor Christmas tree and gave a yearly scholarship to a deserving senior. Plainfield, the town with its Veterans of Foreign Wars, Advancement Association, Woman's Club, church and school groups and Industrial Development Corp.

And were western Waushara county farms as run down as Culver described them?

"This is the place where the business is dependent on the farmers of the area. If the farms on 'the border of this netherland' were either 'just struggling or subsistence' or 'not coming by an honest living,' we would not be in service to this community very long.

"I hope the sightseeing groups that have gone to this area in the last weeks have seen the Mr. J farm 80 rods from the Gein farm with its new buildings

and machinery." And: "Mr. and Mrs. C," retired before age 50; the R brothers with an irrigation system and the largest wheel tractor; Mr. M, whose Holstein cattle are consistently tops; Mr. S, who operates one of the best dairy farms in the state; the G ranch's set of white buildings that would do any ranch in the U.S. proud; the S ranch with three tractors and a modern facility; W acres with 2,000 cattle grazing; potato fields averaging 400-600 bushels to the acre; 700 acres of sweet corn grown in the region.

All cities, said Otto, had their wards or river sections that were looked down upon. "I know that the best farming sections have once in a while a farmer that cannot or will not be anything but a detriment.

"It surely looks as if the murderer was destined to stay the way of a thorn among the rest. He didn't improve nor care to.

"I don't blame all the reporters that have used the words drab, desolate, dark, and wild. A block of solid blooming roses would never be noticed at a time like this. Reporters had a job to do in a horrible situation and they did it.

"I do think this area rates a space for a different description. Now it is regrettable that God didn't give us all a beautiful mansion or a quiet green valley in which to live. What we have here is ours and we like to think that as a whole we aren't much worse and some better than others."

09-17-07

Frank Kohnen

When Frank Kohnen retired, he was the 8th employee of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. to have completed 50 years of service.

That was 1957 and Kohnen, 66, was one of the farmer/paper mill workers so common here. He also happened to be a resident of my town of Rudolph neighborhood where Third Avenue could easily have been named Kohnen Road.

June 5, 1906, two days before his 16th birthday, Kohnen began his employment at the 10-year-old Grand Rapids Pulp & Paper Co. mill at Biron, to be acquired by Consolidated in 1911.

Kohnen said his first job was skinning rolls in the wet machine room for 8.25 cents per hour. With no extra overtime pay, the day shift operated from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m., six days per week, while the night shift was 6 p.m. until 7 a.m.

At his retirement, Kohnen was machine tender on the No. 2 paper machine at Biron, a position he had held since about 1926. In 1957, No. 2 produced paperboard though it had, in the early days, made writing paper and newsprint.

Born in Centralia, Wis., now the west side of Wisconsin Rapids, Kohnen moved with his parents in 1903 to a town of Rudolph farm that is now the Alan and Linda Herzberg residence, 5600 Third Ave.

In the early days, Kohnen rode a bicycle to the Wisconsin River, where he took a rowboat across to the mill;

in the winter he walked across the ice. He said shoes were not worn on the job in the early days. "Going barefooted toughened the soles of our feet and no one seemed to have any smashed toes in those days."

Even with the low wages in the early part of the century, Kohnen said, "People seemed more contented then than they are now."

Looking to the future, he was going to take it easy—gardening, fishing and hunting—having lived "by the alarm clock" for half a century.

Kohnen and his wife had lived in the same house across the river from Biron, just south of his boyhood home, for about 40 years. His 12 grandchildren, he said, "are here most of the time."

Two sons and two daughters, all married, lived in the area. Kenneth, who lived just south of his father's home, and George, Wisconsin Rapids, worked at the Biron mill. The daughters were Mrs. Bette Sarver, Rudolph, and Mrs. Evelyn Miller, Wisconsin Rapids.

But it's no use talking about the old days because the young fellows only say that those old guys don't know what they're talking about. So Frank Kohnen told the *Tribune*. By contrast, the *Daily Tribune* of the same month advocated more study of the past.

"We Americans often tend to scoff at our European friends for immersing themselves so deeply in the stream of their long history but it might be better if we could manage more than a short dip. We don't have trouble remembering Washington, Lincoln and a handful

of other great heroes," said the editorial, "but countless public figures in all walks of life are too readily forgotten." It was "truly startling" how many Americans under 40 had never heard of Charles A. Lindbergh.

According to the *Tribune*, "people young and slightly old sometimes know surprisingly little of the background in fields they like to think of as their specialties. One wonders whether the rock-and-rollers of 1965 will know whether the late Tommy Dorsey was a trombonist or a pro football player.

"Americans live in a land and time so constantly crowded with fresh experiences ... that the old can be quickly shoved out of sight and memory. The miracles of electronic science still unfolding are not likely to lessen this powerful impact of the immediate. We can agree that much can be said for a society that seeks out the new, likes to innovate and experiment, can compel change and then in so many ways adapt to it. Yet we Americans lose many valuable lessons for not remembering our history better."

Historical societies such as our own South Wood County Historical Corp. offer an excellent means of pursuing one's interest in the past. "A lot of breath and energy could be saved," concluded the 1957 *Tribune*, "if we troubled to look back even a couple of decades to see what has been said and done by others."

09-24-07

Crime Spree

The “worst generation” outdid themselves fifty years ago. It was May 1957 here in River City, when a gang of these reprobates, then 20ish, now aged 65-74, got themselves written up in the *Daily Tribune*: “Implicate 26 Youths In Series of Crimes.”

The 13 incidents involved vandalism, breaking and entering and theft in the South Wood County area, dating back to the previous August. Value of property damaged or stolen was likely to run as high as \$500, according to Sheriff Tom Forsyth — when 500 smackers could buy 10,000 Baby Ruth candy bars.

Of the youths, some were implicated in as many as five cases; 22 were under 18; two were 18; one 19 and one 24.

Undersheriff Don Caylor reported he had obtained signed statements from 22 of the “youths.” Of the other four, one was in the armed service and three were at Waukesha School for Boys, where they had been sent for other offenses.

The numerous pending cases were being turned over to the district attorney and juvenile authorities depending on the ages of the delinquents. The scenes of the crimes:

- George Schukar cottage, Lake Wazeecha. Vandalism by three youths, joined by a fourth on a second occasion. This was what we called “out to the lake,” summer site of beach parties, boat parties, beer parties, parking parties, petting parties and general mayhem parties.

- Harold Panter home under construction: vandalism.

- Root beer stand owned by Russell Anunson: vandalism.

- Martin Helke barn: vandalism. (My mother told me that if she heard about me being involved in “vandalism,” that would be the last straw.)

- Heart of Wisconsin Conservation League clubhouse in the town of Saratoga: theft of ten cases of beer. (Stealing beer was popular with the worst generation, especially if you were too young to buy it legally.)

- Ross School, town of Saratoga: vandalism.

- Stainbrook Garage, Rt. 3: theft of car muffler.

- Gerum Meat Market, 251 Oak Street: break-in.

- Heart of Wisconsin Sport Show at Lincoln Fieldhouse: theft of a fishing reel and novelty caps. What youth didn’t love the Sport Show, scene of an indoor fish pond with real fish?

- Bull’s Eye Country Club: vandalism.

- Rapids Auto Wrecking, 510 13th St. S.: taking an auto and then abandoning it following a joyride.

- Skyway Ballroom: theft of copper tubing and scrap “from the ruins.” Loot on sale by the three thieves for \$40.

After the Skyway, located just north of the Tri-City airport, now Alexander field, burned, I rode my bicycle over from Two Mile Avenue and looked at the big black hole into which had fallen the blackened debris. Onlookers were fixated on the possibility that a safe containing a lot of cash was in there somewhere.

Also in the summer of 1957, occurred another amusing incident involving the worst generation.

Depending on the seriousness of the crime and whether it takes place in the day or night, participants are referred to as youths or “boys.”

As reported by Sheriff Tom Forsyth, two boys took a boat owned by Wilbur Winch, 2741 1st St. S., from its mooring at Nepco Lake. They used the boat that day and then hid it on a wooded bank along the lake.

The following day, two other boys found the boat and took their own pleasure cruise, not knowing the craft had already been stolen. Winch, who had discovered his boat missing, apprehended the second pair of thieves.

But one of them fled before police arrived. The boy on the lam later met one of the first two culprits who had stolen the boat and now this pair decided to run away.

They hitchhiked to Plainfield where they took a 1956 model car. A Waushara County traffic officer spotted them just north of Hancock.

The boys ignored the copper’s signal to stop and drove south at high rates of speed until they crashed into a pole and wrecked the car. The boy driving the car received only a bump on the head while the other suffered a broken nose and was taken to Wild Rose Hospital, the same hospital that had treated the famous ex-model Jesseca Penn, recently profiled in these pages.

10-01-07

glen@wctc.net

This one's for *glen@wctc.net* who liked to sign off e-mails with the Z key: "ZZZZZZZZ." From the time we met four years ago, *glen@wctc.net* shared plenty of stories and photos and a lot more where that came from.

Our first conversation was about former *Tribune* editor Bob Des Jarlais. The two had not met but through phone conversations made an unforgettable connection. What started out well for me and *glen@wctc.net* went bad briefly when I headlined his story with a reference to the "amnesia" he joked about.

Because he remembered the old route of Highway 13 running past his family's rural Arpin farm, *glen@wctc.net* and I took the search to the map department of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Most perplexing to him was the computer in his basement study. *glen@wctc.net* and I struggled with outdated software to make digital pictures do what they should. Our big adventures were to his Arpin homeland in search of the old Jewish agricultural community and synagogue. Any farmhouse along the way was a second home to "Z," longtime rural mailman.

What I have left from *glen@wctc.net* are a few undeleted e-mails still in my Inbox.

January 24th, 2007 4:51 PM

Subject: whoops

D, I was wrong, it was (supt. Of schools) S G Correy, z

January 24th, 2007 7:56 PM

Subject: RE: whoops

Whoops again. I think Matt Kenadal succeeded good old Mr "COREY." Actually 69 and 70 were the worst years back to back in history one because of snow and the other muddy roads which made [them] nearly impassible until June.

By the way I have this serious lung thing now and maintain that much of it was caused by the fact I had to drive (delivery mail) hundreds of thousands of miles with my window open on gravel roads and stop and start a few million times in the dust.

Nice shooting the breeze again. I really enjoyed that summer when we did all that getting together with you and Earle [Garber]

ZZZ

January 24, 2007 9:55 PM

Subject: RE: whoops

[D.E.] What's wrong with your lungs?

January 24th, 2007 10:02 PM

Subject: RE: whoops

In early June I had a case of the worst pneumonia you can get...The doctors told my wife and daughter to get the last rites and obituary for me. I was out of it completely for weeks but eventually got out and am probably going to be on oxygen the rest of my life. That is not real good, but better than the alternative.

Zzz

August 03, 2007 11:04 AM

Subject: How are you?

How's my ol' buddy? I miss the ZZZZZZZZZZZs.

DDDDDDDDDDDDDD

August 10th 2007 11:13 AM

Subject: RE: How are you?

DDDDDDDD, How is my favorite author on earth? Very nice to hear from you. Turn down the thermostat.

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

August 15th, 2007 9:01 AM

Subject: RE: How are you?

Hey Z,

Did you say you are close companion of an oxygen tank? Can you converse? The Jewish researchers want me to appear in a video to expound on Arpin.

Uncle DDDDDDDDDDDDD

August 15th, 2007 11:30 AM

Subject: Re: How are you?

Dear Uncle DDD, Outside of the constant need of my oxygen hose I am OK. Let me know if you want some help. Please don't mention converse around my wife she will slug us both

ZZZZZZZZ

August 15th, 2007 3:05 PM

Subject: RE: How are you?

I WILL BE AROUND THE NEXT FEW AFTERNOONS IF IT WOULD WORK OUT WITH YOU. Let me know

ZZZZZZZZ

September 25th, 2007

Subject Glen R Zieher 74

"Sunday after bravely fighting a deteriorating lung disease for the past 15 months..."

Subject: Atonement

ZZZZZZZZ

Sorry, Ol' buddy. Wish I had made that visit happen. You were one of my favorites.

DDDDDDDD

10-08-07

POW Reunion

Fifty years ago, four men with something in common gathered at Lake Aire supper club, south of Wisconsin Rapids, for an unusual meal. The centerpiece was a large bowl of rice. Dessert was a cake with a Japanese Rising Sun depicted in the frosting.

The cuisine (accompanied by steak) was arranged by Robert Ryan for Clinton Guelzow, Floyd Dotter and Peter Karaliunas.

Host Ryan in 1957 was Wood County register of deeds and lived in Wisconsin Rapids; Guelzow was a partner in Paper City Heating Co. of Rapids; Dotter, a Pittsville farmer; and Karaliunas, a Blenker tavern operator.

What they had in common were memories, according to the *Daily Tribune*, of malnutrition, associated maladies and shocking brutalities committed on them and their associates. Two were the county's only known survivors of the Philippine "Death March" of April 1942. The others were captured in the Philippines within the following two months.

A former Army sergeant, Ryan, then 40, had been elected to office six months after discharge in May 1946. The Marshfield native had enlisted in April 1941 and was sent to the Philippines with the Janesville company of the 192nd Tank Bn., a National Guard unit.

Ryan's unit fought the Philippine guerrillas from Christmas 1941 until June 1942 when they were forced to surrender. After capture, Ryan's first stop was at Baguio internment camp from which

he went to Cabanatuan, Philippines. Ryan worked on airstrip construction and farms until October 1944 when he and his fellow prisoners boarded an ocean liner for Japan.

A day out of Manila, the ship was disabled by American planes. The 1,300 prisoners still alive had to swim ashore, dodging bullets. They were next put aboard a freighter which was hit by American planes off Formosa with another 300 killed and Ryan, among others, wounded.

All but 450 of the original 1,619 died before reaching Japan. Ryan was one of 225 taken to Inchon, Korea, where he was liberated by American troops Sept. 7, 1945. He recuperated in various hospitals before coming home. By the time of the 1957 Lake Aire reunion, he was married and had one child.

Guelzow was a native of Oakfield, Fond du Lac County, Wis. He joined the Army in 1941 and was assigned as a light machine gunner in Co. A of the 31st Infantry. Christmas 1941, he was transferred from Manila to Bataan via Corregidor.

American forces, Guelzow recalled, were regaining ground on Bataan peninsula, Philippines, until shortly after the fall of Singapore, Feb. 15, 1942. But Japanese troops led by Gen. Yamashita, "The Tiger of Malaya," were sent to the Philippines "to annihilate our forces" and the poorly fed and equipped Americans had to surrender April 9.

The last morning before they gave up, Guelzow recalled, the commanding officer and his 16 remaining men, him-

self included, "feasted" on the last can of corned beef, doled out, a spoonful to each man.

Then the Death March to Cabanatuan.

As a prisoner, Guelzow stayed on the islands two years, working on roads and airstrips. He was transferred to Honshu, Japan where he worked in copper mines another 16 months.

During captivity, Guelzow's weight declined from 185 to 115. "One day, they brought us in from the mines about 2 p.m., instead of sundown, and we figured the war was over. The Japs didn't say anything, but they later told us we didn't have to salute them or bow to them any more. That [bowing] was the hardest thing for an American to do."

A B-29 bomber dropped food and candy a few days later and on Sept. 4, 1945, Guelzow took a train for Yokohama. Flown back to San Francisco, he was discharged May 11, 1945.

Following the war, Guelzow worked in Fond du Lac as a truck driver and took a job with a heating contractor. He married a nurse and moved to Wisconsin Rapids where he went into partnership with Robert Treutel, his brother-in-law, in Paper City Heating Co.

I can still hear my parents say, on a cold winter night, "Better call Guelzow." For all those year, he took care of our furnace so we could be warm and cozy on the home front

10-15-07

Sgt. Ryan's War

When I think back on all this I wonder if I actually lived through it, it is so unreal."

Sgt. Robert Ryan, a former WWII POW was lucky to be alive. His Japanese guards had been ordered to shoot their prisoners after hostilities ceased but instead walked away.

According to a 1946 *Daily Tribune*, Robert J. Ryan, son of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ryan, 9th Street S., lived through 40 months as a prisoner of war. He had entered the National Guard in April 1941 and landed in the Philippines seven months later and 18 days before the Japanese struck. After Pearl Harbor, the American air force in the Philippines was practically destroyed and the "Japs" were able to conduct daily bombings. On Dec. 22, 1941, the enemy landed and Ryan's outfit was surrounded.

"Three of us hit for the jungles. It took us four days to cross the mountains and we were feeding on whatever we could get, along with the help of some of the natives. We lived in the hills for several weeks and tried vainly to reach our troops. In the meantime, we would strike at Jap patrols and withdraw."

"Finally, after the nips [Japs] forced General Wainright to give in we were ordered to surrender. It took us five days to come out of the jungles."

Ryan said prisoners were well treated only long enough to convince more Americans and Filipinos to surrender. After that failed, "they began to cuff us around for no reasons."

Flies, he said, were thick at the first camp; prisoners had to kill 500 before they were allowed to eat a handful of rice.

On the trudge to Cabanatuan camp, so many prisoners died that they were buried in mass graves along the way. "I noticed the bodies they were burying were nothing but skin and bones and couldn't have weighed more than 70 pounds. Later I was to realize why they were in this condition."

Through woeful sanitary conditions and lack of food, "Many of us got sick, and the only difference with being taken to what they called a hospital was that you didn't have to work."

In part because of language differences, abuse worsened as disobedience was perceived. "If they started to beat you with hoe handles or gun butts," said Ryan, "they kept at it until you fell to the ground, then they would kick you with their heavy boots. But, every man, regardless, got up onto his feet and glared at their tormentors with a look of defiance. They would keep getting up until they were unconscious. As horrible as it was to watch, it made our hearts swell with pride to see the beaten men get up time after time through merciless beatings."

For the 1619 prisoners, leaving the Philippines in December 1944 brought its own perils. Within minutes of being herded into the hold of a ship, men were suffocating; and soon they were bombed: by Americans.

With no food or water while the ship was disabled in Subic Bay, Americans

died as those in the hold went "half crazy" with thirst and hunger. "Even though we knew we might be killed, we were glad that our bombers were giving them Hell. The American planes bombed and strafed us all the next day and some of the men were wounded."

At night, gasping in the dark for air, food and water, "we began fighting amongst ourselves." American bombers hit again with lethal results.

When survivors were told to swim for shore, some of the guards fired at them with machine guns. About 1250 made it to shore, where they were packed into a tennis court for three more days with nothing to eat or drink. Finally put on a ship formerly used for transporting horses, the prisoners stole bags of feed and ate that. The next time American bombers came, Ryan was wounded by shrapnel.

More days without food and water and only 900 remained to arrive in Japan and be marched down the streets while civilians mocked them.

Finally, Ryan and his men were taken to Korea. When liberated by American troops, of 1619 only 230 remained.

In 1946, Ryan was on convalescent leave with his parents here and would report back to a Galesburg, Ill., hospital for further treatment.

While in captivity, the young man who weighed 150 pounds when he enlisted had lost 63. No wonder he wasn't sure if he had lived through a war or a nightmare.

10-22-07

Braves Back Stab

When the Braves came to Milwaukee in 1953, the little people of Wisconsin celebrated. As our heroes rose in the standings the first four years, we fans couldn't have been more pleased.

In the glorious summer of '57, my dad and I got out of bed just after midnight and drove to Adams, Wis., where we caught the red-eye. Arriving in Milwaukee early on Sunday morning, we hiked big city sidewalks for several hours until we found our way into a Methodist church. A "Negro" seated us, which fascinated 12-year-old me because, back in Podunk Rapids, there were no African-Americans that I knew of.

Did the usher notice our matching, Hawaiian-style shirts? Decorated with a tropical theme, the fabric hard, synthetic and semi-transparent. I was sure it made me look like the potbellied little bookworm I was.

During the first game of the double-header, my dad and I had a typical disagreement. He complained that, although the Braves won the first game, they should have played better. In my almost-12 wisdom, I argued he should be glad they won at all. These were my heroes!

Outfielder Hank Aaron, as history would prove, was the best. Slugger Eddie Mathews, at third base, was most popular with my peers. Warren Spahn? The left-handed pitcher could also hit.

Every boy wanted a role model and I picked Johnny Logan. I liked his name; he wasn't so tall; and didn't hit so hard.

He was a shortstop. I was short and had almost an even chance of stopping a ground ball or a pop fly to the infield.

When the Braves came to Milwaukee, nobody made a fuss about their Native-American name. In recent years, I was able to explain that maybe the Braves weren't named for Indians at all.

How could it be or not be? This is how: The Braves had moved here from Boston. Boston was known for a certain tea party in which avaricious white guys dressed like Indians threw tea in the harbor. Therefore, the Braves could have been named after avaricious white guys trying to brew up some trouble.

Probably, like so many of my three-martini anecdotes, it was not true.

Way back in 1870, when a one-year-old team arrived in Boston from Cincinnati, it was called "Red Stockings." A charter member of the National baseball league, that team and its descendants may be the oldest professional team in American sports.

The name continued to evolve: Red Caps, Beaneaters, Doves, Rustlers, and, finally, Braves, in 1912.

Braves history has it that the name was chosen because of Boston's Tammany Hall, a building in which a fraternal organization met that adopted Native American words and customs. It also became a political machine synonymous with corruption.

When the Milwaukee Braves entered the World Series fifty years ago, in October 1957, all was right in America's Dairyland. Not only was the team winning, H. Aaron was the league MVP for

his outstanding hitting and W. Spahn won the Cy Young pitching award.

When the Braves won the World Series over the New York Yankees in the seventh game, pitcher Lew Burdette emerged as a singular hero, and Mathews, Del Crandall, Wes Covington and Bob "Hurricane" Hazle joined him.

A list of the other baseball cards in our pack might also include: Adcock, Schoendienst, Mantilla, Bruton, Torre, Pafko, Thomson, McMahon, Pizarro, Jay.

That year and the next, at Grove school, under teacher Ray Lecy, we were occasionally allowed to hear a snatch of the game on a radio. At noon, I hurried home for a glimpse of TV with my mother.

In 1958, the Braves lost the World Series and the slide began. The next year, they tied for first in the National League, lost a playoff game and didn't get into the World Series. In 1960, the Braves were in second, and, in 1961, fourth.

When, in 1965, the owners of the Braves tried to bug out to Atlanta, Bud Selig, a Milwaukee car salesman and minority stockholder, sued to block the move, arguing that a baseball team owed it to its community to remain loyal. A judge's injunction kept the Braves in town one more year.

Then they left.

Something was sour in Cream City.

When Selig in 1970 pilfered the Pilots from Seattle to become the Brewers, five years had passed without baseball; for me and some of my generation, it was forever.

10-29-07

The Day Daddy Foamed at the Mouth

If my dad planned it, we left early: 5:45 a.m., Friday, May 28, 1954, according to my mom's trip diary, found last week while sorting through boxes in the barn. That's when we packed into the 1949 Pontiac for a family vacation to Washington D.C., where, I now realize, we observed two mortal enemies of historic stature. If I didn't grasp the significance of the moment, in fact didn't remember half of it, maybe it was because I was eight-years-old.

Surprisingly, neither did I remember that we stopped the first day at a Stoughton property that raised horses, including a half brother of Trigger, the mount of my hero, Roy Rogers. "Drove all night, kids real good," my mother wrote.

We stayed May 29 at the Colonial Motel near Salem, Ohio, where we had supper seated around a table cloth on the bedroom floor. Worth noting was a "television in the room." My younger brother, Gary, slept on a mattress on floor.

"On Sunday, Daddy woke us up real early." After traveling the newfangled Pennsylvania Turnpike, we found our way May 30 to D.C.'s Potomac Park Motor Court, a noisy berth with air-planes and trains "going constantly."

"Arrived Sunday about 5, set up tent, looked for groceries, almost everything closed except stores in the Negro district. Got milk and bread for breakfast. Drove around, Daddy got lost!"

Monday, May 31, 1954, Memorial Day. At Arlington national cemetery, among "crowds and heat," my dad held me on his shoulders so I could see the first major figure of our pilgrimage: President Eisenhower, who lay a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. My mother said we "missed him in the car," though I insisted I had seen "Ike" wave from the back seat as his vehicle drove by.

Later that day, we went to nearby Mt. Vernon, where Mom noted, "Washington must have been very wealthy to own and run an estate like that."

We returned tent-side for supper and watched planes fly over Potomac park. Apparently someone mixed "Vel" soap instead of sugar with Kool-Aid and, "Daddy foamed at the mouth."

More crowds and heat June 1 for a tour of the Mall, White House, Lincoln Memorial and Congressional Library (Gutenberg Bible), followed by dinner at Howard Johnson. Daddy locked the key in the car "but got it open with wire."

The next day, "saw Sen. McCarthy at 'hearing.'" That meant I was in the same room as Wisconsin's Republican "Tailgunner Joe," Eisenhower's adversary and a controversial national figure. What did I see?

According to the *Daily Tribune*, about that time, attorney and McCarthy right-hand man Roy M. Cohn handed investigators a mysterious cardboard box of incriminating papers but the senator himself immediately blocked study of the documents until they could be

combed to take out names of informants. The incident touched off an angry exchange with Sen McClellan (Dem-Ark) who demanded that the Eisenhower administration make known its position on "pilfered" classified information. Apparently, the committee took a luncheon recess without digging into the big cardboard box.

Eisenhower called for "less prejudice and passion."

"Through knowledge and understanding we will drive from the temple of freedom all who seek to establish over us thought control—whether they be agents of a foreign state or demagogues thirsty for personal power and public notice." The salvos from McCarthy and Eisenhower soared over my head like the planes over Potomac park, where we had hamburgers for supper.

On June 2, Daddy, David and Kathy walked all the way down to the Washington Monument (and all the way up inside) and saw the Star Spangled Banner at the Smithsonian. We had lunch at Rock Creek Park and "walked and walked and walked." Gary chased pigeons.

On June 3, we left. Kathy was "a little car sick" on the way to Letchworth State Park, New York, where "David fed a raccoon." After a complete tour of Niagara Falls, we drove on, spending a last night at a "dump of a hotel in Muskegon, Mich.," prior to taking the ferry across Lake Michigan.

We arrived home June 6, having done it all in just one week.

11-05-07

The Devil's Prussian Mother

Maybe you're not interested in Friedrich Wilhelm and Amalie Fregin Ehrkle, Prussian-immigrants to Chaseburg, Vernon County; they are so deceptively quintessential.

Whether Friedrich lived comfortably in Germany on his father's estate and whether he and Amalie left for America in 1870 because his family didn't approve of his marriage are not your concern. Who doesn't have a baron and a bastard in their genealogy?

Whereas I have attempted to dig deep for true facts and no fiction, I have fabricated the name, Ehrkle, to protect those not guilty of the worst crimes.

It is apparent that the firstborn child of the above-mentioned Friedrich and Amalie was Gustav Adam Erdman Ehrkle, born in Chaseburg, Wis., in 1871, shortly after his parents' arrival from Prussia, now Germany.

Said to be, as an adult, tall, good-looking, dark-haired, smart, stubborn and thrifty, he married Helen, 13 years younger, around 1903. Poor Helen; she soon found herself in South Dakota and then divorce court.

After their first three children were born they moved west of Pierre S.D. to prove up a homestead claim, but Gustav built his family a small shanty and then left them with no money. A neighbor had to supply food. When a son was badly burned, the father, Gustav, refused to pay for medical help. Helen summoned a physician anyway.

To escape, as it was published in an

October 1907 *La Crosse Tribune* was that Helen had to carry her very young children five miles to the railroad. Her father had sent money needed to return to 510 Gould St., La Crosse, where she unsuccessfully pursued a divorce.

On the plus side, there was the Ehrkle Bros. store, selling a fine line of fruit and vegetables at 797 Rose St., La Crosse.

What about Emil Ehrkle, accused of stealing tools from the La Crosse threshing machine company's plant at which he worked? Ehrkle admitted the charges but suggested he was not to blame, having been intoxicated at the time.

Then there's Albert Ehrkle, La Crosse, a Gund brewery bottling plant employee, who mugged a drunk of pocket change on Main Street late one afternoon. Had Ehrkle not been so kind-hearted, he might have absconded successfully, but he stopped to throw a half-dollar back so the victim could get a room for the night, allowing a good glance before Ehrkle ran down Mormon Coulee road.

Not to mention that it was the third robbery to happen to the same victim in a short time, all while he was drunk, inspiring him to claim a loss this time of \$140. A search of his house revealed six cents, a half loaf of rye bread and a quarter pound of lard.

When Albert Ehrkle was sentenced to Green bay reformatory, he left behind his wife Agnes, a widow 11 years older than himself, who had three children of her own, plus three with Albert.

Another Ehrkle, Lena, did not leave mayhem to the men. In June 1908, she was charged with verbally abusing an-

other woman on Rose Street. When she also was charged with poking a female tenant in the eye with the point of an umbrella in 1915, the courtroom was "drowned in the tumult as each fought for supremacy."

In 1913, Ferdinand Ehrkle got 30 days in jail for beating his wife, Johanna. Wife and daughter agreed Ehrkle was drunk at the time of the assault.

The scene was calmer out by Chaseburg in Hamburg township, Vernon county, where our Friedrich Ehrkle, a farmer, and Amalie, lived in 1880 with Gustav, 9, Alvina, 4, Augusta, 3, and Emma, 9 months.

At the turn of the 20th Century, Friedrich still lived in Hamburg town with Augusta, Emma, Otto, Eddie, Henry, Ida and Bertha; but his wife, Amalie, had died in 1897.

There were other children of Friedrich and Amalie; Alvina Louise, who got married and had some kids, including Emma, who lived in Burnett County with unmarried brothers Edward and Henry'

Some of the children of Friedrich and Amalie are buried in a Lutheran cemetery in Vernon County. Among those interred elsewhere, is Agusta [sic] Wilhelmine, second oldest and oldest girl, born July 21, 1877.

She died Dec. 31, 1945, and is buried in Plainfield, Wis., next to her husband, George P. and her unmarried sons with the family's familiar names of Henry and Edward.

She is Augusta Gein.

11-12-07

Gores the Butcher

Helping kill a beef on Charles Street, La Crosse, Julius Wittenberg became the victim. As the cow was brought into the killing room, it smelled fresh blood and became enraged, breaking the hitching rope and chasing Wittenberg into a corner, then goring and kicking him.

It happened at the “A. Gein” meat market.

The previous year, the *La Crosse Tribune* referred to some “Gein brothers” who had bought out the Schultz grocery. The only known Geins around were the family of George Gein. Known to be born in 1873, George P. Gein cannot be found in any census prior to and including 1900.

That was the year he married Augusta, most likely at the Chaseburg, Vernon County, Lutheran church. The first of their two sons, Henry, was born in 1901 or early 1902.

Old La Crosse city directories list George Gein living at 612 Gould St. His jobs included section hand for the Milwaukee Road, laborer at Davis, Medary and Platz tannery and fireman for La Crosse Gas Co.

A second son, Edward Theodore Gein, was born at La Crosse, on or about Aug. 28, 1906.

In answer to the 1910 census, George said he was a retail dealer of groceries. Augusta was 32, Henry, 9, and Edward, 3.

In 1913, August Koch, an employee of the La Crosse Gas & Electric Co., was cleaning a switchboard in the power

house, when he was killed by a 2,000-volt shock. Co-workers struggled and failed to save him. A pallbearer was George Gein.

Shortly after the incident, son Ed said later, the Geins moved to Juneau County. In 1914, they bought the former John Greenfield farm in Waushara County on the Adams County line for a reported \$3,500. Southwest of Plainfield, the Gein place was a mile north of Flyte’s or Hull’s mill, in a rural neighborhood called Big Roche-a-Cri. The 1920 census shows: George Gein, 47, a farmer; son Henry, 19, farm laborer; Edward and Augusta, no occupations.

In the 1928 Christmas season, “society” news from Big Roche-a-Cri had Henry, 27, and Eddie, 21, visiting the neighboring J.W. Hull family on a Wednesday evening.

The 1930 census still shows George and Henry as farmers and Edward T. with no occupation. Henry worked away from the farm, including as a “foreman of Jamaicans.”

The father, George, a semi-invalid in later years, died April 4, 1940, at age 65.

In May 1944, Henry was burning over marshland when the fire escaped control and firefighters were called in. Henry did not return home; a search by lantern light found him dead but he had not been burned or obviously injured and the manner of death remained unresolved.

Not much later, following a couple strokes and considerable nursing by son Eddie, Augusta died, Dec. 31, 1945, at age 64.

In November 1957, the last Gein, Edward, was arrested for murders and grave robbing of women resembling his mother. He died July 1984 at Mendota Mental Health Institute, Madison.

Among what remains to be explored is the story of Ed’s father, George Gein. According to Ed, George was born in 1873 at Coon Valley, Wis., and was an “orphan.” In the 1905 census, the place of birth of George’s parents was “not known.” In 1910, his father was documented as born in Wisconsin, his mother in Germany. In 1920: both Wisconsin; 1930: both Germany.

A Web site says the name Gein was originally “Gee” or “Mc Gee” and that, when Gee or Mc Gee was courting Augusta, the newlyweds changed the name to Gein. Indeed, there is no “Gein” to be found prior to their 1900 marriage.

In 1880, “George Gee” lived with the Dingledine family in Vernon County. He was born in 1873 (same year as George Gein), of a Canadian father and a mother from “Hess” (Germany) and “adopted.”

In 1900, George Gee, “servant,” continued to live with the variously-spelled Dingledeins, a name that ends like “Gein,” which is actually spelled “Gien” in the 1910 census.

There is a word in English: “Gein.” Like “geology,” it refers to the earth. “Gein,” is akin to “humin,” a bitter, brownish yellow, amorphous substance extracted from vegetable mold and generously supplied in a random shovelful of Waushara County dirt.

11-19-07

Picture Postcard Past

Pretty as a picture. Like the 2007 Central Wisconsin history video by Paul Gross, a sequel to the 2006 version. The all-new production covers a variety of Wisconsin Rapids scenes as depicted in historical postcards, blended with current photos and videos. The show is narrated by South Wood County Historical Corp. president Phil Brown who also provided many of the postcards.

Speaking of a picture postcard past, your own Uncle Dave, the author of this column, happened to be reading a Nov. 16, 1949, *Milwaukee Journal* that crossed his desk at SWCHC. It included a couple stories bound to sober up all lovers of homily.

Mrs. Kate Alice Merrel Wells of Evanston, Ill., 29, noted violinist, had a feeling she was going to die, so she left a message containing 13 rules to her son, Lynn, 10, to guide him through life.

These are the rules:

—When there is a job to do, do a good job. Never a sloppy one

—Work hard when you work. But play hard too.

—When your time is free, explore the things you think might be interesting. Follow your curiosities.

—Be active with your hands and mind; but find plenty of time to observe how beautiful and strange the world is.

—Respect your body. Keep it clean and healthy.

—Never live too far away from outdoors. From trees and birds, animals and

plants and insects, mountains and blue water.

—Don't load yourself down with too many things. Have only such property as you really love and use. Have those few things as fine as possible and then cherish them and care for them lovingly.

—Never, never start a fight. But if someone else does, give 'em back what they asked for.

—Never make excuses for yourself. Own up to your mistakes and don't repeat them if you can help it.

—Think for yourself. Don't believe what you read, or what other people say unless it seems true to you.

—Make plenty of friends but learn to enjoy yourself alone, too. Don't ever count on anyone but yourself.

—When you're older, if you have to go to war, remember it's better to fight like a man and die, than spend the rest of your life an invalid, depending on other people to take care of you.

—When you're older, remember sex is natural and fine if you make it so.

Besides these 13 pieces of advice, Mother Wells, who had been recently divorced from "manufacturer" Stephenson Wells, also bequeathed to her son a shiny new gift: the rifle with which she had committed suicide. She instructed that it be cleaned immediately, "since it will be Lynn's."

"It's new and beautifully accurate. Some day he will get a lot of pleasure out of it."

Along the same line from the same page comes a tale from Lynn, Mass., where a "heartbroken war widow"

pleaded in an open letter for the answer to her 11-year-old son's quest, "Why did my daddy have to die?"

Sylvia Goldstein, widow of Maurice, who died in WWII wrote that her 11-year-old son had been waylaid by several boys who insulted, spat, beat and kicked him into the gutter because he was as they sneeringly said, "a Jew."

"Ironically enough," said Mrs. Goldstein, "my son was coming home from a Boy Scout meeting – a meeting at which one of the watchwords, I believe is: 'A scout is reverent, he is reverent toward others, he is faithful in his religious duties and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion.'"

In Berkeley, Calif., a boy told his mother the baby sitter had knocked out his tooth, so the mother called the cops.

This is what they found:

The sitter had taken the boy home to her parents after he locked her out of the house, threw her school books out of a window, turned off the lights with the master switch, kicked her in the shins and, "in general acted like a brat."

The sitter's father threatened the boy with a cold shower without effect so he washed out the boy's mouth with soap.

To the police, the boy admitted he had pulled out his own loose tooth and the officer concluded that, if anyone was mistreated, it was the baby sitter and her father.

11-26-07

RFK @ LHS

Remember Corn Soya? Didn't think so. In a similar vein, I have traveled the land with a tale about how I was almost sure I saw "the president's brother," Robert F. Kennedy, at the Lincoln High School field house but can find no one who shares that memory. Just like Corn Soya.

I know where I sat and how scared I was that principal Aaron Ritchay had me in mind he said he would jump off the stage and haul the hapless punk in the white shirt out, in front of the entire student body (to be heard, I imagined, banging my head against lockers all the way down the hallway to the office).

I know where I sat and how intrigued I was by the somewhat frail but fierce gent from somewhere else, with a floppy excess of light-colored hair and an eagle beak. It was his voice that intrigued me most: sharp, light, foreign almost, "Put the cah in the barn" and "Cu-ber" for Cuba. Why he was warning us so sternly about organized crime in the labor unions?

Probably no coincidence that, a couple years later, for my senior Hour Talk, I wrote for information about these same union thugs, Dave Beck, Jimmy Hoffa. "Bobby" was attorney general then and someone from his office wrote back.

The subsequent address of mine amounted to 40 minutes of my already-distinctive "dry humor" that caused Mr. Goetzke to nod off but not actually fall out of his chair.

Remember when Bobby Kennedy came to Lincoln High school?

Clippings show he traveled through Wisconsin in late January 1960 because of our important April 5 state primary election: Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy against Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey. "If my bother does well here," RFK predicted, "he'll get the Democratic Party's nomination and beat Nixon."

Feb. 12, 1960, *Daily Tribune*: "Students Hear Talk by Robert Kennedy," who "spoke to the Lincoln High School student body this morning on his experiences as counsel for the U.S. Senate committee investigating labor and management malpractices." Kennedy had arrived in Wisconsin Rapids by plane, landing at Alexander Field shortly before 11 a.m. and departing our fair city soon after his talk at the school.

He was back a few days later.

In the same paper that announced that the *Daily Tribune* and Radio Station WFHR had moved into a new building, came the account of an improbable Sunday night when Kennedy spoke to 175 persons gathered for a baked bean and frankfurter supper at the Moravian Church hall.

A photo taken at the church shows RFK having his plate filled with "Boston baked beans," in homage to his Massachusetts background.

Kennedy repeated that "if Jack wins the Wisconsin primary, he'll get the nomination," and again denounced labor racketeering. He was asked if his

brother, 43, wasn't too young to be president. Kennedy said that some non-Catholics would vote against "Jack" and some Catholics for him, but the percentage voting based on religion would be small. Then he said something no candidate would risk in our present political climate.

Kennedy claimed a principal reason for the high fatality rate among American prisoners during the Korean War was the result of GIs leaving fellow soldiers behind to die. He said that so many American prisoners collaborated with the enemy because the prisoners cared only for themselves and had no regard for religion, country, friends or family.

"We must place responsibility for schools, churches, communities and country above concern with ourselves and our personal security," he said. In other words, ask (pronounced "ahsk") not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.

In a parallel event the following Sunday, Hubert Humphrey would speak at a dinner in St. John's Episcopal church Memorial Hall. To mirror Kennedy's beans and franks, one wonders if the menu included staples from Humphrey's home state such as lutefisk, peas and lefse.

At the time, I didn't care too much for Kennedy or Humphrey. My dad was solidly in the Nixon camp, and I was too busy with my Corn Soya.

12-10-07

Santa Was My Brother

Youngest brother, Kenny, played St. Nick. A right jolly elf he was, coming up the basement steps at our Two Mile Avenue home, wearing a red bathrobe and a basketball net for a beard. Ho! Ho! Ho!

Little Kenneth Lee was already bald in blotches; but that was because my dad cut his hair. Though the baby of the family was shy and self-conscious, nothing made him happier than hopping around the piles of pretty paper by the Christmas tree, handing out gifts.

Ken as a young man moved to Bellingham, Wash., but flew back for Christmas and funerals. He also spent three mostly-joyous weeks here each summer as my brother Gary's cribbage buddy and my co-conspirator. His thick fingers did finer work than I could; his strong back did the heavy lifting; and his sharp intelligence sought perfection.

We bought matching DeWalt cordless power drills and he became "Walt" and I, "D. Walt." A couple months ago, before he left for Bellingham, we raised our DeWalts in triumph, standing on our masterpiece, a moonlight-viewing platform.

Last Monday, we in Rudolph township packed up Ken's package of gifts that he would unwrap one per day with the same patience that allowed him to sit and wait for his soup or pizza to cool while others burned their tongues. Likewise, we knew his packages to us would be arriving any day, to be opened on Christmas Eve at Gary's

Plainfield home, with all the family in on the action and a video to record the event.

But last Monday morning, something happened.

Ken, a baker for the Western Washington University food service, was working when the anti-Claus we call the Grim Reaper smacked him a good one on his now-bald head. Blood flooded his brain and he was, for intents and purposes, dead.

It was almost exactly what had happened to my sister, Kathy, in 1988. The aftermath also followed a pattern.

Somewhat to my surprise, I learned that Ken had made a pact with the Grim Reaper via the state of Washington Dept. of Motor Vehicles. Ken would play St. Nick one last time. He would be Santa, Father Christmas and a Salvation Army bell ringer.

He would be the Fire Department Toy Fixup Crew and the party at the Odd Fellows hall. He would be the reformed Scrooge tossing turkeys to beggars. In the confusion of metaphors characteristic of the season, he was the sacrificial Lamb of God. The gift was himself.

On the second night, Tuesday, Ma in her Polartec and I in my cap banked the fire and settled down for a long mid-winter nap in Rudolph township, knowing our brother was not stirring but lay in a white-sheeted manger among the blipping monitors, stainless steel crosses and Christmas trees of St. Joseph hospital, Bellingham. The babe of the family was now bald-headed, wearing a real beard and a hospital gown,

surrounded by well-educated wise men, shepherds and familiar angels who held his hand and sang to him.

After midnight, the phone rang here and I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter. A male nurse named A.J. told me the time was ripe for "harvest." I could only imagine the scene as out of the chimney (or elevator) popped the jolly old elves, in their red bathrobes and basketball nets. Their sacks were empty but would soon be bulging.

A.J. made a list for me and checked it twice.

He wants to give the kidneys? Right. Liver? Yes.

Pancreas. What's that?

Intestines, valves, veins, corneas, marrow, bones, skin, tissue: yes, take it all.

Something else? Oh yeah, the less marketable parts, ethereal appendages that cannot be boxed up, wrapped and hauled away by strangers. Stuff that had already been transplanted.

Love? Unquestioned. Dedication? For sure.

Loyalty? Lifelong Packer fan.

Blood, sweat and tears? Affirmative. Wit, wisdom, goodness and mercy. Yup. Generosity? Obviously.

Let's say it's Christmas Eve and we are on the newly-constructed moonlight viewing platform. Naturally, we are impatient for the first sight in the western sky: among the satellites, his aerial contraption. Good St. Nick, Lamb of God, flying in tonight.

12-17-07

Cold Room

The room at the crest of the narrow stairway was always “Aunt Mamie’s.” The flowery wallpaper and puffy quilts were reserved for weekend visits from my mother’s sister, Mildred, who had left home after eighth grade.

It was her job as housekeeper for a Black Creek, Wis., undertaker that allowed her siblings, Florence, Gordon, Arline and Willard, to enroll in high school despite the bankruptcy of their farm.

Mamie was good to us kids too. For our drive home, she gave us miniature candy bars and for Christmas, a book: “Treasure Island,” “Oliver Twist,” or “God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.”

After Aunt Mamie’s room was the door, usually closed, of the cold room. The dust of the warped floor was seldom disturbed and the oilcloth window shade never lifted except by ghosts and us, my cousin, Dennis, and I, who savored a chilly night; because, under the one small bed was a cardboard box of adventure to be plundered with the zest of Long John Silver.

Under the bare bulb, we took a death trip past old ghosts in long coffins; other elders that might or might not be dead; night-gowned wax babies propped like dolls on pillows.

Actually, we didn’t see any dead bodies, just photographs of my mother’s family laid out on the quilt, itself probably pieced together by one or more of the women pictured.

With forensic zeal and a magnifying glass, my older, braver, cousin and I studied Civil war daguerreotypes and Kodaks of would-be Great War saviors and more recent World War II soldiers. There were a few brittle newspaper clipping and articles from weddings and funerals. We also saw proud immigrants and farmers by new homes; newlyweds; new graduates; and portraits of smart, hopeful young persons.

A favorite image showed a man kneeling by a tree while a boy stood and a woman sat on a wooden chair. Was he praying or had he just planted the tree?

The third room of the old farmhouse, usually my sister’s for the visit, was warm. Through a floor grate arose comforting heat, along with the balmy banter of the family’s adults in the dining room below. The folks at the table downstairs were living likenesses of images on the cold room photos and, taking a few steps to the future, the likeness of us, though we would not have believed it.

The murmur was fueled only by coffee, never stronger spirits in this house. Besides a general leveling of presidents, kings, popes, preachers, weather forecasts and government agricultural experts, came a roll call of the local Germanic United Brethren: Wesson, Werner, Kuehne, Mory, Miehle, Mueller, Fischer, Sylvester, Gosse, Tesch, Dingeldein, Thiel, Schmidt, Engel.

Put together, the voices of my aunts and uncles in the warm room under the floor combined in a heavenly choir not to be forgotten. Never mind that my aunt sang like a rooster, my uncle like a mule

and my mother, a chickadee.

I wasn’t there the day they carried the cardboard box of pictures from the cold room. The old folks were taken to a nursing home, the residual contents of the house were auctioned and the 80-acre farm sold. My share was \$30 which I spent on raspberry bushes like those favored by Grandma.

The old farmhouse now looks like a movie set about to be engulfed by a creeping suburb. I haven’t looked at the rooms since the sale in the 1970s.

The fourth room of this Christmas Carol is this room, where I now write and where I have some of the same photos I looked at half a century ago spread across a table, to be scanned and published as a gift to the future.

Only the same two of us are left to do the identification. And Dennis already looks older than the bearded patriarchs we once wondered about. Grandpa.

To the ghost photos from the cold room are added more recent snapshots and wedding portraits of those whose voices heated up the warm room: grandparents, parents, and aunts and uncles. And to them, pictures of us, who were once children eavesdropping from above.

Maybe someday other brats will puzzle over the same pictures on another Christmas, just as they are bound to wonder about the mug shot of the hobo with the long stringy hair. Hopefully my biographer will inform them that I am the spirit of a good old-fashioned River City Christmas: Uncle Dave.

12-24-07

Glory Be

Glory be to Cut Bank, Mont. My grandpa had traveled to that arid outpost in 1956 to attend the death of his cowboy brother, Robert Engel, 69. More times than one, I have pitied Robert for dying so far from home and pitied too my 73-year-old grandfather, for, as I imagined, his lonesome task, riding back in a frigid baggage car, with his hand steadying the casket of the brother, as the two rattled toward Wisconsin.

Glory be to the Empire Builder, the majestic passenger train from Chicago to Seattle. A couple years ago, I saw Cut Bank slide by my train window on the way to visit my own younger brother in Bellingham, Wash. Sometimes I wondered whether I would be bringing Walt back home in a box as my grandfather had his brother half a century ago.

As far as I knew then, 50-year-old and balding “Walt” was perfectly healthy, though he was overweight by a bag or two of the poppy seed muffins he baked in the Western Washington University food service kitchen.

In the end, I didn’t have to make that trip; America brought him to me. It happened by remote control. There was no fuss, no bother, no bureaucratic mumble-jumble, no screw-ups and, throughout, I was treated like the second husband of Ivana Trump.

It started Dec. 10, 2007, with instant American-style communication with St. Joseph hospital, Bellingham, via the cell phone of Ara, Walt’s best friend. After

she communicated the bad news, the phone passed to the attending physician who said it was time to find out if Walt had authorized organ donation.

Glory be to the state motor vehicle departments that keep track of such figures and to a country that would go to that much trouble transplanting body parts from a dead person to a living one.

The phone was handed on again to the next in line, like we did when Walt called on Christmas. This time a nurse from the organ donation agency, Life-Center Northwest, negotiated to wait for Walt’s brain to stop flickering so more organs could be available to harvest.

As promised, Ara called at 1:33 a.m., to tell me the plug had been pulled and the lights had gone out. The phone rang a few minutes later with an update from an exultant nurse: “The kidneys look good.”

Glory be to the helicopters that took off like you-know-what from the North Pole with packages eagerly awaited throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Glory be to Ritchay funeral home. I called them next and for nine days, whatever I wanted or needed, Mike Ritchay provided. Last week, he would have written this story for me; tonight, I seem to be on my own.

Without effort on my part, Mike had my brother embalmed and flown to Wisconsin. Glory be to the jet plane. But what was Walt going to wear in the fine cherry-look coffin that symbolized his woodworking talents? He had been shipped in a hospital gown.

From 2,000 miles west, Ara sent his

plaid party shirt and, exactly as promised, the box was found leaning against my front door in plenty of time. Glory be to FedEx and I’m not kidding.

My brother looked good with the De-Walt drill I fitted in his hands to be buried with. Glory be to the cordless drill and Keyless Chuck.

Glory be to longtime friend and First English Lutheran pastor Ken Hanson, who orchestrated “the best funeral ever” at our family church, United Methodist, where administrator Kathy Duerkop made everything happen smoothly. Glory be to her.

And to Vicky Dresser for tasteful guitar and heavenly singing, “Turn Turn Turn”; the “walk with me” song; and “on wings of eagles.” Glory be to the church ladies and gent who served lunch.

Glory be to Haertel Monuments who immediately found a suitable site in Restlawn Cemetery, not far from our parents: just like Walt had requested.

Glory be to the peripherals of death care in America in the 21st Century: flowers sent from anywhere; memorials from the Bellingham campus; messages on Voice Mail, condolences on emails.

Glory be to Shaw Lee restaurant in downtown River City, Walt’s favorite restaurant here, which provided a familiar upper room for family and friends to gather in the name of Walt, who once uncharacteristically greeted a waitress there, “Yakisoba Baby!”

Glory be to Walt and I’m not kidding.

12-31-07

Marceil

If uttering emanated from the hustings, that was no surprise, said the Rev. Beauford L. Marceil, of River City's own St. John's Episcopal church. "Everybody thinks it must be a joke if anyone besides some handpicked politician is a serious candidate for president." Furthermore, Marceil said he would not be a "noncandidate," like Nelson Rockefeller, Bobby Kennedy and Pat Paulsen, a television comedian from "Laugh In."

Most of the 75 parishioners present when Marceil announced his campaign at the 10:30 a.m. service, Feb. 25, 1968, did not take him seriously. They thought the campaign was "just his way of emphasizing certain points he had been making." Some reconsidered when the minister distributed campaign literature proclaiming himself, "common sense candidate for President of the United States," and setting forth a platform that included:

Lower voting age to 18.

Lower social security retirement age to 60. (Marceil was 58.)

Guarantee the privilege of working regardless of age or color.

Stipulate that the office of President of the United States be dependent on definite qualifications such as knowledge of the Russian language.

Base tax system on ability to pay rather than "the privilege to earn" in which the wealthy avoid income tax payments through loopholes.

Investigate poverty program to sepa-

rate real needy from the parasites.

Operate department of education composed of state delegates not subsidized by federal agencies.

Create World Council of Human Existence.

Create non-political "department of truthful information."

Marceil said he was a citizen but not a racist, a public servant but not a politician, a taxpayer but not a millionaire. "It is a very strange situation when we have to draft candidates and we have comedians on the air making a mockery of it."

The Oshkosh native, Wausau high school and Nashotah seminary grad had served Waupaca, Amherst, New London, Shawano and Antigo before replacing the Rev. James M. Johnson here.

While at Waupaca, Marceil had married Kathleen Cristy. When they came to Rapids in 1944, they had two children, Christopher and Christine.

More recently, he had been stirred to activism by the book, "The Uncomfortable Pew" and had become concerned about what he called the "comfortable pulpit."

Marceil issued a "pre-election statement," in which he said, "I wanted to find out if a common little man in this country can do something more than complain in private about things in general which are wrong in our society...I have left the comfortable pulpit to challenge the comfortable pew to think and speak."

After a month of campaigning, Marceil said much had happened that was both confusing and disturbing. Dissatis-

faction seemed to reign, he said, which in itself was neither new nor unhealthy, "but the accompanying bewilderment is alarming to many. Hundreds of people have personally welcomed and endorsed my announcement, and their confidence prompts me to speak for them. We ask what has happened to the soul of America?"

Marceil said he was not impressed with "an Elephant from the same circus as the Donkey, nor do we look with favor upon Doves and Hawks that roost in the same tree. When it takes more than \$50 million to prove which party will be privileged to lead the country, we begin to understand how easy it is to waste billions of the taxpayers' money."

Four years later, in 1972, Marceil, then 62, retired after 28 years as pastor. "I was ordained to say mass in a Catholic-type church. If the church changes to an organization which is more business-like, I don't see the priest in that type of role."

Marceil and his wife had published a booklet on Indian lore and had made four movies with Sunday school classes and adults of the parish. He also carved wood chapel railings and the altar front for the church and was past vice president of the South Wood County Historical Corp.

Of his participation in community activities, Marceil said, "I have tried not to make this a parish in itself but a part of the world-wide universe."

01-07-08

Clean Gene

Not THAT Sen. McCarthy, the righteous Wisconsin Republican named Joe who rode phantom Communists out on a rail. The OTHER Sen. McCarthy, the righteous Minnesota Democrat named Eugene Joseph, who earned his recognition through opposition to a President from his own party, Lyndon B. Johnson, and to the Viet Nam war.

Memoirs readers will recall that, in 1960, Robert F. Kennedy had campaigned for his brother, John F., at Lincoln high school and the Rapids Moravian church. In March 1968, Democratic candidate for the nomination Eugene McCarthy arrived here, thanks to our April 2 Presidential primary election.

McCarthy was scheduled, as RFK had been, for an 11 a.m. assembly at Lincoln High school, followed by a public rally at the Labor Temple, said Mrs. Marvin Bocaner, who was making local arrangements. The public was then invited to a luncheon in the Camelot Room of the Mead Inn. After that, McCarthy would move on to Stevens Point State University.

A native of Watkins, Minn., the 51-year-old McCarthy had served 10 years in the House of Representatives and was elected U.S. senator in 1958, to be reelected in 1964 with the largest popular majority ever received by a Democratic candidate in Minnesota.

McCarthy was known for a youthful “army” energized by opposition to the war. A Princeton University student on

spring break manned the local McCarthy office at 625 W. Grand Ave. and coordinated canvassers, composed largely of local high school students until the arrival of fifty college students from Iowa, Minnesota, New York and Chicago.

The first order of business for McCarthy’s visit was to cancel the scheduled talk at Lincoln High school. Second was to impress audiences with reverse charisma. At a Mead Inn press conference, McCarthy observed, “I have nothing special to say here today,” and, according to the March 26, 1968, *Tribune*, “the five-minute exercise bore him out.”

McCarthy told reporters traveling with him that he differed with the Johnson administration on farm programs—and dodged a question about alternatives to the present Vietnam policy.

Saying he would speak further at a speech at the Tri-Cities Labor Temple, McCarthy averred it was not his boyhood dream to be president of the United States, “and I’m a little suspicious of men who had that dream. What we need now is a reconciliation in the land... between young and old, one race and another race, between Congress and the president,” and between “the secretary of state and the foreign relations committee.”

At the Labor Temple, Milton Schneider acted as master of ceremonies and McCarthy was introduced by local attorney Dennis Conway. About 700 persons, about a third students, heard a 13-minute speech delivered “in a bland manner.”

In questions that followed, Margos Stone, co-chairman of the Wood county committee backing McCarthy, asked him to explain his Viet Nam views in more detail. “I think the people here are very concerned about this,” she said.

McCarthy answered that he would work for a negotiated settlement with a coalition government that would include Viet Cong representatives. If South Vietnamese leaders [our allies] would not agree, he would order a gradual withdrawal of American troops and support.

It is an accepted piece of political lore that some “hippie” anti-war students got “clean” for “Clean Gene,” meaning they exchanged bell-bottoms for khakis, cut their hair and didn’t smoke pot before 5 p.m.

As a graduate student at the conservative University of Wyoming in Laramie, I was already pretty squared up when my thesis advisor, Ken Craven, commandeered me and other students for a dangerous foray into redneck Cheyenne about fifty miles over the ridge to the east.

At the Frontier Days rodeo roundup, we risked physical retaliation by slipping McCarthy literature under cowboy truck windshield wipers.

In the end, McCarthy lost the nomination to Minnesota brother Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. HHH lost the general election to RMN and righteousness wasn’t what it had been.

01-14-08

Cohen

Earle Garber's recent *Tribune* story about his grandfather, Frank Garber, inspires a look at another Jewish immigrant and businessman who made his mark here. At the time of his death in 1924, ex-mayor J.A. Cohen was president of the Citizens National Bank, which he had organized in 1912 and opened on April Fools Day, 1913 □ a bad luck date for the institution that would go broke a few years later.

According to the April 1922 *Daily Tribune* series, "Who's Who In Wisconsin Rapids," Joseph Abraham Cohen, son of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Cohen, was born Feb. 12, 1869, at "Aleckintz, Province of Berlin." He attended school at Brody, Austria, until 12 years of age and then went to work as a store clerk.

Brody was a settlement that fell under various regimes, sometimes Polish, and is now in Ukraine. It was a haven in the 1880s for Russian Jewish refugees, many of whom traveled on to the U.S.

In 1889, with brothers Max and Nathan, Cohen came through New York City to Milwaukee, Wis., where he clerked for two years in the Steinmeyer Co. general store.

In 1890, he joined his brothers in a Neenah, Wis., "general merchandise business," arriving in Rapids a year later, to open "Cohen Bros.' General Merchandise" in the later location of Beardsley grocery. In 1903, Cohen built a brick building on First Street North.

In 1919, stock was transferred to the Merrill store and the building leased

to J.R. Ragan for a furniture business. The Cohen brothers added branch stores in Waupaca, Stanley, Wausau, Merrill, Rice Lake and Stevens Point. All but Merrill closed by 1922.

Cohen, a stockholder in several leading businesses, was also celebrated as a community leader. He helped organize the chamber of commerce and, during WWI, was chairman of the Liberty Bond and local Red Cross drives. He was a Mason, Elk, Odd Fellow, Rebekah, Moose and Republican.

Perhaps of most interest, Cohen in 1912 was elected mayor of Grand Rapids by a big majority over three candidates, the first to run with opposition and yet carry every ward. He was reelected without opposition and served a second two-year term.

Accomplishments during the Cohen administration were: street paving; a waterworks and sewerage system; a pumping station on Oak Street; the electric light plant taken over by the city; a fund to build a new City Hall on the West Side; and a swimming pool.

Also in 1912, Cohen organized Citizens National Bank, which opened in 1913 in a building that, by the 1922 story, was occupied by the Cozy Café. In 1916, he erected the bank building that later became the Wisconsin theater lobby. Banking commenced in 1917.

Cohen, who accumulated a substantial fortune, often entertained at his cottage on Lake Biron.

The *Tribune* had a little fun with him in 1917, with a headline, "Jos. Cohen's

Life in Danger – Ex-mayor Cohen Stands a Chance of Being Assassinated for Deeds of Others." Leaving his store, Cohen had met a portly German lady who hailed him. "I am going to pull your ears. My taxes are \$110 and you did it. I am a poor woman and how do you expect me to pay so much taxes?"

Cohen, who couldn't get a word in "edgeway," found it difficult to convince her that he had been out of office nearly a year "and she had treed the wrong coon." A more damaging incident occurred in 1919 when the "prosperous Grand Rapids merchant" stopped his car on Grand Avenue across from Nash Hardware and lit a match to see how much gas was in his tank. Later that night, Cohen, his face swathed in bandages, was able to attend the (WWI) Victory Loan meeting to hear attorney John Roberts give him tongue-in-cheek credit "for being the first citizen to be gassed on the Grand Rapids front."

Five years later, Cohen died but not without casting a ballot from his Riverview hospital room for a new mayor, Otto Roenius. He also left behind a gift which arrived the following year: two "monumental" fountains, one for each side of the river.

Substantial citizen, businessman, merchant, mayor, president of the chamber of commerce, banker, earnest worker, "ceaseless plugger for the best interests of the city": the immigrant, Joseph A. Cohen.

01-21-08

1980

That day in history.

That day in January 1980 when Uncle Dave came to work at the *Daily Tribune*.

After a dozen years in the pedagogical trades, I had returned to my home town and the journal I had been reading all my literate life. I wanted to find out what it was like to be a real writer.

That day in history was a busy one at the *Daily Tribune*. On the first floor resided the classified and business offices of the *Trib* and the studio and offices of Radio Station WFHR, call-lettered for founder William F. Huffman, Sr. Here, local personality Arnie Strobe ran his popular coffee klatsch program, invariably sending neophytes to Neipp's Hardware for Whink or chastising elderly housewives for trying to give away dead cats.

At first-floor rear, the big Goss press was operated by Bruce Leberg, a gruff bear at work but a generous, gentle Santa on his own time. The second floor was shared by the newsroom and advertising departments. The former was overseen by editor Joe Karius from an office window and by Bob Des Jarlais from his city editor desk.

The advertising department surrounded the closed door of publisher-owner William F. Huffman, Jr. When I wanted to communicate with him, I slipped notes under the door. Toward the back of the building was a small room with an already outdated teletype machine.

Further, a photo studio and darkroom, and the "backshop" where the next issue was laid out and prepped for printing.

That day in history, 28 years ago, it was a novelty for me to be downtown again. A few of the business places were the same as I remembered but just as many had changed. If I took the riverside walk, I passed, not necessarily in this order, Emmons' office supply store, Norington's cleaners and the old *Tribune* building recalled vividly by coworkers LaVerne Keller and John Thompson. To the east was the great mass of the Grand Avenue bridge.

Across the Avenue on the "north" was a one-story version of the adjacent Mead-Witter landmark, the River Block, about to be replaced. Here was former jewelry store, former Fey photo studio and what had been the old library branch. In the Mead-Witter block was the restaurant that had been Wilpolt's, taking on one of its subsequent identities, "Locos Hermanos." Sometimes I stopped at Rapids Bakery for date bars, seldom at Abel's Men's Wear and at Newton's Women's Apparel only to see my then-new friend, Ellen Sabetta, SWCHC curator.

On the corner storefront in 1980, the former Woolworth's site, was the Coast to Coast hardware store. Then Johnson Hill's, the crown jewel of Grand Avenue: a department store in the old style, complete with mezzanines and in 1980 home to a jewelry store, beauty salon, gift store and sporting goods in the basement, where the grocery had been.

That day in history, there was the First

National Bank on the southwest corner and Church's Drugs, where I picked up prescriptions, and back toward the bridge, the former Quick Lunch, then the former Mecca saloon, the Lunch Box, the Wisconsin Theater in its seedier manifestation, showing X-rated fare and selling videos and Siebers' restaurant, an impecunious journalist's rapture, offering two eggs any style, hash browns and coffee or tea for 99 cents.

The entire east block at 111 West Grand was taken up by Montgomery Ward general merchandise.

That day in history was Paper City at its peak, humming along like a big roll of Consolith fine printing paper, its growth rings ever thicker, richer, slicker. Our town was the coated enamel paper capital of the world. Consequently, the brain trust of the leading producer of the world's best paper occupied its World Headquarters a block away from West Grand Avenue.

In the main office, attached to the mill were the personnel and records offices. An old stone building in a park-like setting was reserved for company leaders.

Recognizing me as one of the Consolidated brotherhood, Public Affairs director Daniel P. Meyer escorted me from office to office, to meet and greet each dark-suited board member, officer or vice president and to shake the hand of chairman George Mead II himself.

With the exception of me, everybody seemed to be doing pretty well that day in history.

01-28-08

1970 Restaurants

In 1970, pizza was almost universally popular here, served mainly by locally-owned restaurants; but fast food chains had recently inserted big wing tips in the door. So it was shown by a *Daily Tribune* dining guide found in a bin of old papers.

Beginning in the district explored two weeks ago, which can be called “Downtown,” were the following restaurants:

- Sieber’s, formerly Art’s, 221 W. Grand, where Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Sieber offered coffee and “good food.” Patrick had been hospitalized following a “freak accident” and his 15 employees carried on a business open 24 hours a day Wednesday through Saturday.

- Quick Lunch, 243 W. Grand: also open 24-hours with counter service “on a budget price basis,” Mr. and Mrs. John Tishin, owners.

- The Country Inn (now Shaw Lee): The former Wilpolt’s, operated by Maurice Mathews, with beer available and a menu tailored to the office worker, traveler and family, “a mecca for the later afternoon Coke gang and West Side coffee break groups.”

- Woolworth’s: the dime store lunch counter managed by Dorothy Wirtz. The then-current feature, a thick 40-cent malt.

- The Brig: fine dining in the Hotel Dixon at West Grand and Fourth Avenue, “a favorite rendezvous for after game gatherings.”

- The Place: “After dining,” go-go girls’ galore at 621 W. Grand, managed by Charlie Spencer, better known as

Charlie Brown.

- Millie’s Cafe on West Grand: “We are small but O-My,” new ownership of mother-daughter Edith and Mary Haske.

- Sugar Bowl, 170 Second St. S: 49 years of coffee, candy and “Instant Radar Cooking,” owner Tom Poulos and employee Jimmy Drivas.

- The Mead Inn: English elegance in the Camelot Room and Pub with ale by the yard. Dining in South Pacific room. Still operating.

- Michael’s Cocktail Lounge owned by Belle and Harley Brown. Now Hollyrock’s.

Meanwhile, Eighth Street rising:

- Stafford’s Restaurant, 325 Eighth St. S.: fountain service, homemade rolls, bread and pies, recently purchased by Mrs. Robert (Edna) Holtz.

- The Hot Shop: in IGA Foodliner.

- The Terrace: “Zakons 70” and go-go girls, owned by drummer Gerry Irwin and wife .

- Pasquale’s: “Have a pizza with Pat” (Foti) Pasquale. Not much changed in 2008.

- The Wilberns: “gay, crowded, intimate,” cocktails and food, cranberry bread a trademark, owned by Tom and Josephine Wilbern since 1952.

- Portesi Fine Foods: Mr. and Mrs. Mario Portesi’s pizza and drunken chicken, son Syl, new manager. Continues in 2008.

- Ebbe’s Lake Aire: “where you get a lot more for driving a little farther” (past Nepco Lake). Continues in 2008.

- Wink’s Alamo: Highways 13 and 73

(Smoky Joe’s Corner) pizza and piano bar, owner Warren Winkler.

- Fine Lunch Cafe: 531 Hooker St. across from Consoweld Corp. Mrs. Melvin Ponczoch serving “everything from soup to nuts.” 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., having baked 30 loaves of bread. Operating nearby as Little Pink Restaurant in 2008 [Closed by 2009].

- Parmeter’s Chicken Hut: 1920 Wylie St., Ila Parmeter’s “good home cooking.”

- Al & Hazel’s: Al and Hazel Jaecks on Highway 54 east: chop suey, chicken chowder and homemade soups.

- Ketchum’s Edgetown Supper club: “where good friends meet just over the West Grand Avenue viaduct.”

- The Ridges Inn & Country club: open even after golf season for a “man-sized cocktail,” “famous salad bar” and dinner. Parties in the Tiger Den. Continues to operate in 2008.

Two relatively new establishments in 1970 served as hamburger harbingers of a future in which restaurants would be extensions of regional or national chains.

- Robby’s, 1751 Eighth St. S.: a McDonald’s-style hamburger stand. “Have you tried a Zinger. Only 50 cents. You’ll be glad you did.”

- Pizza Hut, 1841 Eighth St. S.: The Rapids Pizza Hut was the ninth in Wisconsin opened by Green Bay Packer Bob Long, who had also starred at Wichita State in the Kansas city that was world headquarters of Pizza Hut.

02-11-08

Squares Were Cubes

Like most of my generation, I was a follower of fashion. As a Two Mile outsider at the fringes of town, I modeled after the cool kids who lived up by Grove school. But I guess the local hepcats weren't as cutting edge as I thought. Evidently, according to "50-years-ago" perusing of the *Daily Tribune*, none of it was original.

For instance, when high school boys like me embellished what band director Roger Hornig called "greaseball" haircuts with blonde streaks, we were following a fad, a few years late. My own "do" included a frontal double dip, bleached on both sides and curling toward the middle like pop idol Fabian's. Pal Dave Hanson favored a Kennedy flip with his bleached forelocks.

"Teen-age fads flare and fade," said Eugene Gilbert, president of the Gilbert Youth Research Co. Already in 1957, two-tone hairdos were "back in style," as "bobby soxers" replaced many of the boyish Italian haircuts and ponytail styles of a year or so previous.

Gilbert learned that raccoon coats were coming back, while "sloppy Joe sweaters" were on the way out. "Despite these capers," he said, "this year's high schooler will be neater, dressier than last year's model."

"Some adults no doubt will be upset by these youthful methods of gaining attention but they ought to think back to their own college and high school days when swallowing gold fish, wearing lumberjack shirts and doing the big apple were the rage."

Gilbert said teen-agers doted on being different from both children and adults so they adopted fashions, hobbies and a language all their own, e.g., brightly-colored "chignon" hairpieces. "It looks ghastly but at least it draws the looks," said one enthusiast. "People think you got splashed going under a painter's scaffold."

Levis and dungarees were fading from the scene among the "hip (i.e. culturally integrated teen-agers)" in favor of Bermuda shorts, straight skirts, pale pink lipsticks, Shetland sweaters, wool socks, raccoon coats, crewneck jerseys, khaki slacks and car coats. New were pearl studs inserted in ear lobes.

Boys wore charcoal-grey slacks, bola ties, V-neck sweaters over white T shirts, brightly flowered vests, loud argyle socks and large cuff links. Crazy hats: golf caps, deep sea fishing caps, natty fedoras with long bright feathers, porkpie hats turned up newspaper reporter style, beanies equipped with pinwheels, Scotch tams and French berets.

Come to think of it, that would be the crazy hats at Penney's that classmate Darwin Hodgson and I bought, probably my favorite ever, a felt fedora with a feather. All the happening guys at Grove school had similar hats.

Boys and girls indicated they were going steady by exchanging school rings, pins, fraternity buttons, identification tags and bracelets. In Ohio, he said, if a girl sported a penny between the laces and tongue of her moccasins, it meant she was without a date. If she sported a nickel she already had a date; a dime

indicated she was going steady. Hence, what we called, "penny loafers."

In Indiana, a boy hung the scarf or muffler of his steady from the rearview mirror of his hot rod. She made a reciprocal show of affection by wearing his football or basketball sweater.

To the emblems, we might add "letter jacket" and "class ring."

To Gilbert, teen-aged jargon seemed to be in decline as far as originality was concerned. "Hip," "cool," "Daddy-o," "most" and like expressions from the world of jazz still held a place in teen conversation but the "bopsters" were giving way to the "Madison Avenue speech-makers" advertising crowd, said Gilbert, with such expressions as, "that's the way the mop flops" and, "that's the way the cookie crumbles."

About the only new teen-age word Gilbert encountered was "rauncy," (raunchy), meaning bad to rotten in the East and, "unaccountably," good to very good in the Southwest.

A "square" was the lowest form of adolescent life "because he isn't hip, the equivalent of hep a decade ago." The square had degenerated into a "cube," indicating he was more hopelessly out of date than a square. Teachers and parents, Gilbert said, would be happy to know that "this year" only a cube would be found wearing blue jeans and sloppy shirts and sweaters in the classroom.

The "hip" kid would be nicely and smartly dressed – after having parked his or her raccoon coat in the cloakroom.

02-18-08

Abattoir

Poor guy thought it was the rest room; but it was the door to the basement of a “West Side business establishment” and down he tumbled, eleven steps. City ambulance transported him to Riverview hospital where he died of a head injury.

The December 1957 victim: Fred J. Whitrock, 66, 130 18th Ave. S., one-term Rapids mayor 1932-34, also alderman for the 6th and 7th wards.

Rev. William Lange presided over the funeral at St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church; burial was at Forest Hill Cemetery.

Whitrock was born in the town of Seneca, April 18, 1891, son of Mr. and Mrs. Matt J. Whitrock. He married Eleanora Engel, Sept. 24, 1914 (no relation to Uncle Dave).

Whitrock had been employed since 1940 as an operator at the city’s sewage treatment plant.

Also in late 1957, another city employee of note came to attention: manager 1937-1952 of the municipal Water & Light Dept., Frank Steib. He had died Oct. 14, 1956, at age 81 and his estate was probated in 1957.

Steib had operated a drug store here and held a position in the purchasing department of the Consolidated paper company. He left an estate valued at \$782,000, mostly in the form of 18,104 shares of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co stock, to which Steib’s daughter, Mrs. Carol M. Daly 550 8th Ave. S. was principal heir.

The mayor who followed the previously-mentioned Fred Whitrock in office also died in 1957: W.T. Nobles, 70, attorney since 1926 and hizzoner for seven terms, 1934 to 1948, who died at his home at 220 Clark St.

The funeral was at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church, Rev. Joseph Tetzlaff officiating, with interment in Calvary Cemetery.

Nobles had held the office of mayor longer than any other in the city’s history. Born in Centralia, April 16, 1887, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles L. Nobles had also served 11 years as an alderman and one term as Wood County clerk.

Nobles would have known the previously-mentioned Frank Steib; Nobles was president of the Water & Light Commission for 15 years, 1936 to 1951.

Though he didn’t work for the city like the three persons mentioned so far, circumstances surrounding another 1957 death bring a whiff of the world to come.

A 58-year-old male, to be unnamed, was found by employees in a room of a butchering plant he had recently opened, deceased by what coroner Dr. Norbert Arendt termed a self-inflicted gunshot wound from a .22 caliber rifle.

In business here since 1941, the former Illinois resident and his wife planned to operate their meat processing plant in conjunction with a frozen food locker plant in Wisconsin Rapids. What the *Tribune* called a “slaughtering plant,” had begun operations in the fall of 1957 just south of Highway 54 east of the city.

“The most modern, small abattoir in Wisconsin,” employed the “latest methods and emphasized sanitary conditions.” Animals were delivered to pens at the rear of plant and, when their number was up, led up a gangplank into the main building’s “live holding pen.”

A step down into the “knocking pen,” and the animal was stunned by a needle fired from a gun. A quick trip of a lever and focus of attention rolled onto the “kill floor” where it transformed from animal to carcass. After the blood drained, the carcass was placed on a “skinning cradle,” where its hide and viscera were removed. An automatic “beef lander” picked up the good part which was cut in half by a “beef-splitting saw” in about a minute, in comparison with the old hand-saw method which required some 20 minutes.

The halves of the carcass were then sent to a the chill room via a track rail attached to the 16-foot high ceiling, and transferred to the “aging cooler.” The process was completed with the actual cutting up of the carcasses in the butchering room into the more appealing steaks, ribs and roasts.

The above procedure was used for beef and lamb. Hogs were picked up by a hoist to be bled and then rolled into a scalding tank in which 98-percent of the hair was removed in a minute and a half. Using modern methods like this, two men could send eight 200-pound hogs to the chill room per hour.

02-25-08

1957 Strike

Back in the day, workers were choosers not beggars. Not so long ago in this accomplished town in this great rust belt of this industrious nation, employees organized into vast, powerful and often corrupt unions that were a match for the companies they worked for. When the workers in unions found conditions not to their liking, sometimes they refused *en masse* to appear on line until their demands were met. That meant a “strike.”

A *Daily Tribune* headline from Oct. 9, 1957, revealed: “Paper Machines Start as 20-Day Walkout at Consolidated Ends.”

It was back to work at the big Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. mill in downtown Wisconsin Rapids and at the other CWP&PCo. divisions: Biron, Stevens Point and Wisconsin River (Whiting). The Consolidated Appleton pulp mill was to be in full operation also.

Representatives of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services had helped bring together the United Papermakers and Paperworkers Union and arranged for the final negotiations, bringing to an end the second and most serious strike in Consolidated history.

The *Tribune* counted six international unions in action, representing 70 per cent of the company’s union employees. Members of the papermakers union represented 30 per cent of the union population.

The general gist of the *Tribune* story, as it would be whenever the *Tribune* viewed social or economic disruption,

was that the strike was a sorry waste. Idled had been 1,125 papermakers, 185 union office workers who didn’t cross the picket lines and over 1,200 non-strikers sent home for lack of work. That was out of a total Consolidated employment of 4,300.

Wages lost to strikers and others idled by the walkout were estimated by the company to total about \$900,000. Company spokesmen had calculated daily payrolls at \$35,000 in the Wisconsin Rapids and Biron mills; \$7,500 at Stevens Point and Whiting; and \$4,500 at Appleton. To arrive at the total, overtime was added and the whole multiplied by the loss of 18 running days.

With the shutting down of the five mills, paper and board unmade and unshipped by the company amounted to 19,500 tons. Consoweld and Ahdawagam divisions operated at a normal rate because they did not employ members of the papermakers union.

Although contractual relations with trade unions had been established by Consolidated in 1919, the only previous strike occurred in September 1956 when machinists and pipefitters walked out for two weeks.

According to the *Tribune* of Oct. 8, 1957, the ending of this second, three-week, strike lifted a burden from the minds and hearts of River City. “After what was the most serious and least understood strike in company and community history, it is difficult to know who won what.”

Losses, on the other hand, recounted the *Tribune*, included those of striking

papermakers going without hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages that would not soon, if ever, be recovered.

“Some of the papermakers say they won a moral victory. Perhaps that is so but evidence of even that is hard to find.”

Consolidated lost about \$4 million in gross sales dollars. Non-strikers and others idled by the strike also lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages. And some merchants had a real reason to complain about the lack of business.

On the bright side and deserving mention, said the *Tribune*, was the gentlemanly conduct of company and union, expressed in a simple way through a conversation that took place on a Wednesday in late 1957.

Man in store—“What did you papermakers get?”

Papermaker—“I got to go back to work.”

“Well we all have a touch of poetry in our souls and it’s wonderful to hear the great paper machines roaring again,” said the *Tribune*, “as they pour the community’s life blood into the arteries of the nation’s commerce.”

One of the Consolidated employees was my father, not a “papermaker” per se but a welder and Machinists union officer who was discomfited by the conflict. While Dad was briefly unemployed, our neighbor, John Murgatroyd, hired him and we went out to cut brush in the creek bed that was to become the Ridges golf course.

03-03-08

Sputnik

Looking at the sky would never be the same. On a starry eve, probably late autumn 1957, on our Two Mile Avenue lawn, my nuclear family formed a tableau that was mimicked across the nation. Mom, Dad and kids wanted to see the famous IFO and, according to my recollection, we succeeded, following a tiny, blinking dot that made its way across the sky. Sputnik!

“Sputnik,” the Russian coinage that brought about beatnik, peacenik, nudnik, refusenik and niknak, signified the earth’s first man-made satellite and circled some 560 miles “out in space,” according to the 1957 *Daily Tribune*.

Launched by multiple-stage rockets on October 4, the instrument-laden globe was only 23 inches in diameter and weighed 185 pounds. Soon followed the “dramatic claim” that Russia had beaten the United States in the “satellite race,” soon to be known as the “space race.”

The Russian news agency, Tass, said this first Sputnik could be observed with simple optical instruments in the evening or early morning. “Artificial earth satellites will pave the way for space travel and it seems that the present generation will witness how the freed and conscious labor of the people of the new socialist society turns into reality the most bold dreams of mankind.”

Russia’s second space satellite was launched November 3. In it was a small mongrel dog named Laika. The idea was that the Russians would receive radioed

information on Laika’s bodily reactions as the half-ton Sputnik sped around at altitudes of 1,000 miles.

But the radio transmitters went dead after a week or so “as expected,” claimed the Russians. Tass, the soviet news agency said that “the program of scientific research as planned through the second Sputnik has been fulfilled completely.” The dog was dead.

The Italian Communist newspaper said, “Laika will never return to earth.” She had been “put to sleep by a strong narcotic contained in the last bit of food to avoid its suffering prolonged agony.”

No. Laika died a few hours after launch from stress and overheating.

In December 1957, America’s first satellite-launching vehicle, Vanguard, lost “chamber pressure” in the first stage, fell back on the stand, toppled over toward the water and exploded, bursting into fire. The American attempt to put a 3-pound test sphere into orbit was a dismal, embarrassing failure that led to widespread panic about the condition of American education, as pundits wondered, “Why Johnny can’t shoot rockets into space.”

Johnny gave it a shot. In Floydada (Home of the Whirlwinds), Texas, a chemistry class was busy trying to assemble their own earth orbiter.

A student said, “We had mixed together carbon, potassium chlorate and sulphur and placed it inside this one-foot-long piece of pipe. The ends were capped with a hole in one end.

“We had twine tied to the rocket, which was on a roller skate, and had planned to

hold it back with the twine. Later, the teacher said, we would make a stronger fuel, and might even try to launch the rocket.”

Fourteen members of the class were gathered around the teacher, Garland Foster, on the school grounds when Foster struck a match to the opening at one end of the rocket; but the match went out. The next time he tried, the rocket fizzed a second and then exploded. Pieces of iron went in all directions. What was left of the roller skate was blown about 20 feet away. The 40-year-old teacher and a former employee of the Atomic Energy Commission research center at Los Alamos N.M. were killed.

Reminds me of my own attempts to achieve jet propulsion. My cousin, Dennis, had perfected a fuel: gunpowder made from sulfur, saltpeter and charcoal from which he made little firecrackers that actually exploded.

Without parental approval, I secretly mixed the ingredients in our breezeway, including charcoal from the fireplace. Then I filled an empty CO-2 cartridge and tied it to a plastic model car, perhaps a Cadillac convertible.

Lighting a trail of gunpowder that led to the business end of the “rocket,” I stood back to watch.

Flames shot out the back with a fierce whistle, the cartridge heated up and the little car melted into a blob. Fizzlenik.

If it’s any consolation, no animals were harmed in the experiment.

03-10-08

1957 Misc.

Smog. Fifty years ago, right here in River City. A blanket of smut across the city's northwest side, within a half-hour causing four traffic accidents with damage to 10 vehicles and three persons. Smoke from smoldering debris at a Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. dump near the 5th Ave. and Nash road intersection combined with heavy ground fog between 17th Avenue and Highway 34.

Accordingly, on 4th Avenue North, a car struck the rear of a pickup. Five minutes later at the same location, four vehicles collided bumper to bumper, the lead car leaving the scene. In the 1500 block of Bonow Avenue, a car struck the rear of another and ten minutes later two more southbound vehicles collided nearby.

- A drug was developed in 1957 that a lot of us are taking fifty years later: chlorothiazide to relieve hypertension.
- The Christmas season featured a photo of John Billings, still a premier resource for historians here. At the time, he was foreman of mail at the Wisconsin Rapids Post office, shown by the *Tribune* inspecting a pile of 2,000 pieces of undeliverable Christmas mail, mainly due to incomplete addresses.

Envelopes, said the *Tribune*, were examined and valuables sent to the district dead letter office in Wausau to be auctioned off. Letters "without value" were burned.

- In an editorial, an abashed *Tribune* combined confession with accusation.

It seems an acquaintance, J.J. Normington, told them a tale about an injured hunting companion gashed in the leg by the antlers of a wounded elk. "Very exciting. Also very phony, but we didn't know at the time that the injured man had accidentally bumped into a broken tree branch."

The false story, groused the editorial, had been carried into over 27,000 central Wisconsin homes by Rapids, Marshfield and Point newspapers.

- "Integration" of schools was a topic under local discussion. The term referred to annexation by Wisconsin Rapids of adjoining and nearby districts: Joint No. 2, town of Grand Rapids and village of Port Edwards (Two Mile and Grove); No. 3, town of Hanson (Bean); and No. 2, town of Saratoga.

Integration of Biron-Children's Choice, which had voted against annexation, was denied.

City school board president John Crook argued that it was not "cricket" to bring in districts not contiguous to the city and spoke in favor of "over-all integration" rather than a hit or miss pattern. Gilbert Endrizzi and Mrs. S.G. Corey spoke for annexation of Two Mile and Grove, which were being taxed to capacity, they said.

- Farther from home, also in late 1957, the famous Mackinac bridge linking upper and lower Michigan was opened. My own *River City Memoirs V* concludes with a photo of my sister, Kathy, and my young self, looking toward that same bridge while it was under construction.

For the original opening in November, a caravan was led by Michigan Gov. G. Mennen Williams. Last summer, with Hugh and Carol Midor, my family happened to be at the same bridge on the day of its 50th anniversary, noted by a parade of antique autos mimicking the 1957 fete.

- Another story with reverberations: from Saigon, then the capital of South Viet Nam, where time bombs shattered the United States Information Service library and injured 13 US soldiers in a sudden outburst of anti-Americanism—by radical ideologues the US referred to as Communists.

- And a story headlined, "What's behind the trumped up threat of war in the Mideast?"

"Sober thinking men in many places are deeply puzzled. What is it really all about?" The immediate focus was the Syrian-Turkish border.

US experts assumed the Soviets were alarming the Arab world and "the globe" with threats and then would move in the opposite direction and become "the great preserver of the peace."

With the Soviets backing Syria, we would stand at Turkey's side in event of attack by Syria and would strike Russia in retaliation.

While the issue was being talked out, the danger lessened, said the *Tribune*, that "trigger-happy men intoxicated with their own falsehoods" would "touch off a fateful burst of fire in the Middle East."

03-17-08

I Believe You

Other guys, they like big fires. They like trucks with big tires. They like movies with lots of killin'. They don't like...

"Bob Dylan!"

That's what we say in our song. But who are we?

We're the guys from Mid-State "Poetry" Towers. "Listen how we work for hours, writing poems about the flowers."

And so, with that frivolously evocative invocation, we bid *hasta la vista* to some of you other guys, because we have mentioned "poetry" and other guys don't it. They might name their own kids Dylan but they don't like Bob or Bob's lyrical namesake, Dylan Thomas, the chubby Welsh drunk who uttered with some eloquence, "Don't go gentle into that good night; rage rage against the dying of the light."

Thomas, during his American forays, stayed at the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan, aka MSPT-Metro. About 15 years later, Bob Dylan wrote "Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" in the Chelsea, or so he said in a song.

Dylan Thomas' favorite pastime was drinking himself to death. His last words have been quoted as, "I've had 18 straight whiskeys. I think that is a record." His last words have also been said to have been, "After 39 years, this is all I've done." Or, were they uttered to Liz Reitell, his lover? She said his sudden illness wasn't so bad and Dylan said, "Yes, I believe you."

Maybe the final soliloquy was, as also reported, "I love you, but I am alone."

I remember my dad's last words, before he entered the hospice, where his end was markedly un-gentle, "I know who you are." He meant me.

Dad's last project was to build the addition to my house now referred to as "the Towers" and where the guys get together. MSPT was founded circa 1990 or so as a Guinness-drinking society, but Guinness isn't what it used to be, so we don't brag about it as much.

The name was not my creation, rather the 1970s inspiration of Bison Hepcat (Michael Balisle). His "towers" are a feature of the landmark Kuhl house that anchors Main Street in Stevens Point.

The name MSPT purposefully echoes and antidotes "MSTC," Mid-State Technical College, with which I am also associated. One is devoted to usefulness and the other to uselessness, not to mention outright folly.

It is from Bison that I also took the name for a literary journal: *Hepcat's Revenge*.

You don't have to drink to be one of the guys but you have to write. MSPT is first and foremost a literary society, welcoming any genre. My own challenge is to compose a new song per meeting.

As time goes by, purposes change. Like the IOOF of my dad's generation, MSPT functions in part as a burial society. At a recent funeral, Towers guys made up a large proportion of the mourners.

Like my blood brother, President George W. Bush and the guy who named

Grim Natwick, I honor the Towers gang with nicknames.

Dr. Mango Van Rasp (Joe Boero), physician; Hank Stir (Henry Bruse), airwaves technician and urban cattleman; Hugh Midor (Hugh Mechesney), recently retired 4th grade teacher.

Peppy Johnson (Thomas D. Stern), retired Wood County veterans officer; Senator Lawton (William Lawlor), UWSP English professor; Justin Case (Don Isherwood), Plover potato grower.

J.J. (Jeffrey Johannes), art teacher, LHS; Scooch (Don Romundson), attorney; Col. Goc (Michael Goc), prop. with Bubbles de la Touche of New Past Press; Himself O'Day (Tim O'Day), NewPage oiler.

David de los Angeles (Uncle Dave), multiple factotum.

Members emeritus are William L.M.H. Clark, Mark Scarborough, Pete Frank, Matt Welter, Bruce Dethlefsen. My daughter, Angelica, is the only female contributor, other than my wife, who provides the chocolate chip cookies.

Which brings me to my real reason for writing this. You and yours are invited to join "the guys" at McMillan library Thursday evening, 7 p.m., as part of the coffeehouse series.

The Guinness will not be available at the library but, yes, you are invited to join the guys at the Grand Avenue Tavern to share a pitcher of the good stuff. Just don't pull a Dylan Thomas and end up in Riverview with a tourniquet around your liver.

03-24-08

World War II

Not the best of times; not the worst of times. These are mediocre times. For the civilization at large these are not times of unusual prosperity nor are they times of universal poverty. These are not times of peace nor do most of us feel the effects of a faraway conflict.

By contrast, the World War II years were the worst of times for many U.S. soldiers and residents and, surprisingly, the best of times for some.

In his public television series that was also aired at McMillan Memorial Library Fine Arts Center, documentary filmmaker Ken Burns has shown how, for the soldier, the war could be ghastly, and, for those at home, a litany of loneliness, anxiety and loss.

Last Monday, in connection with that program, I listened as Joe Kosek brought a personal note to the series as he told what he saw as a Marine corporal in combat when the best of times meant dining well in exotic New Zealand; but soon came the worst of times on body-strewn beaches and in jungles where snipers who had been shot in trees hung by their ropes like strange fruit. Kosek and his men were taking back from the suicidal Japanese the islands of the south Pacific: Tarawa, Okinawa, Saipan.

After Kosek's remarks, library director Ron McCabe told me about his grandmother, who had six stars in her window, one for each son in the mili-

tary and thus, unreachable, untouchable and in mortal danger. On the home front, never mind shortages, blackouts and rationing, it was the worst of times.

Tonight, at McMillan Memorial Library, I'll be pulling what some call a Tom Brokaw by practicing some pun-ditry on the greatest generation.

First, let me tell you what part I played in the greatest drama of our time. On Aug. 6 and Aug. 9, 1945, "atom" bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. When Joe Kosek arrived in Japan, he viewed the results.

Me? At that time, immediately preceding the Japanese surrender Aug. 15, I lived in Riverview Hospital.

When I was a couple days old, I was brought home to a second-floor apartment behind the present St. Lawrence School. Mom said she had to crawl over because there wasn't enough room to walk around the bed. I later learned it had been a hot miserable summer for my mother, having moved from Manitowoc, known for its cool breezes.

My dad was working for the Garber salvage and supply firm here. He had earlier flunked his draft physical a couple times, joined the State Guard and spent much of the war at the Manitowoc shipyards, welding submarines.

It was in the 1970s that, as an English instructor at Stevens Point college, I realized the parents of my students would, after that year, no longer be of the World War II generation. For their semester project, I had the class (in their 50s now) ask their parents (in their

80s now) the standard question "What did you do during the war?" I had already talked it over with my parents and numerous other relatives.

This week, my ex-MSTC student, Marge Hamm, a youngish member of the WWII generation, brought to the SWCHC Museum a set of letters she had, as a 15-year-old, received from a soldier she had written to. It reminded me that, while my college class was busy with their papers, I was reading the collection of letters my mother had kept.

For letter writing, it was the second-best of times, after the Civil War, which Burns had previously documented. In order to fill out the Burns series and to complement the reminiscences of Joe Kosek, McCabe asked me, as city historian, to say a few words about life on the Home Front.

In 1999, I published a book, *The Home Front: River City Memoirs VI*. A major portion of RCM VI consists of a timeline I began in 1989, chronicling events of 50 years earlier. That was 1939, when German armies blasted off their version of shock and awe.

Tonight, at 7 p.m., at McMillan Memorial Library, I will tell you what happened right here in River City during World War II, and how it was the best and worst of times.

03-31-08

War Contracts

A week ago, at McMillan library, I was talking about the home front during World War II but spent so much time making jokes about my new cell phone, I left out a lot of important information.

In 1940, as war approached, the central Wisconsin economy and community were already on the rise. Wisconsin Rapids showed the second-largest percentage of population increase among Wisconsin cities during the previous decade, from 8,726 to 11,416, a 30% increase.

George Mead I of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co told the *Daily Tribune* that “our business is in no way influenced by the defense program of the national government. We are a normal industrial community and, as such, we have never suffered from the same influences which bring the extremes to communities elsewhere.”

Half true. Some of the local companies that joined the war effort:

- Harvard Clothing, a subsidiary of L.L. Rosenthal of Chicago. The entire factory was converted to the defense effort and more than 175,000 army overcoats and blouses produced. Bolts of cloth were received from the government, cut into patterns and directed to one of many sewing machines staffed by women.

- Prentiss Wabers Products Co. In 1942, the first war contract for the stove maker included bombs, detonator fuses (for anti-tank mines) and field

kitchen equipment. “Preway” subcontracted with Ahdawagam Paper Products Co. and Central Electric Service Co. for machinery of parts.

Employment would increase to over 1,000 of which a large number were women. All employees had been fingerprinted and given courses on prevention of sabotage.

- Ahdawagam Paper Products Co. The cardboard core factory and subsidiary of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. made: shipping containers for batteries used by the signal corps; tubes to protect shells; boxes for shipping repair parts for tanks and guns; and boxes for food, ammunition and supplies.

In late 1942, paper manufactured by Consolidated was being tested by Ahdawagam as a base for a plastic material that would equal aluminum in strength and could replace scarce metals in plane and glider construction.

McDonnell Aircraft Corp. had begun experimental production of airplane parts from the material which could be molded or shaped like plywood, was resistant to moisture, stable at high and low temperatures and resistant to denting or splintering when pierced by bullets.

- Nekoosa Edwards Paper Co. Made wrappings for bandages and other materials.

- Sampson Canning Co. Employees had received a letter from Cornelius Manning, stationed in Italy, written on a label from a large can of Sampson’s Heart of Wisconsin green beans. He

had found it in a mess hall

- Western Condensary. The Vesper plant produced milk sugar used in production of penicillin, the new wonder drug.

- Nekoosa Foundry and Machine Works. Nekoosa Foundry president M.J. Power said the next year would bring disappointments and sorrow to man; but from an employment point of view it was the best of times.

More than \$1 million in war contracts were filled by the company, said Ted Olson, vice president, including products for shipyards in Massachusetts, Manitowoc, Sturgeon Bay and Milwaukee.

It had converted from making paper and pulp mill machinery to making covers, brackets and valves for destroyer escorts and submarines, for diesel engines, pumps and generators—and equipment used to make atomic bombs.

“Some of the equipment we made for the atomic bomb factories was very touchy,” Olson explained to the *Tribune*. “A lot of the parts we made had to be precision-tooled as exacting as watch parts. We knew we were working on something secretive but had no idea that we were instrumental in making parts for factories making atomic bombs that were loosed on Japan and brought the war to a sudden end.”

04-07-08

WWII-II

Among my late brother's effects was the book, *Inside the Third Reich*, by Albert Speer, Hitler's architect in which Speer remarked that, although he was trained only as an architect, he was inexplicably promoted to minister of armaments; so were other amateurs such as Hitler himself raised to their levels of incompetence. In this way, the Nazi regime that appeared invulnerable was, in Speer's depiction, destined to crumble, rot and roll away.

The opposite was true here. We appeared unprepared but soon rose to the challenge. Americans soon became involved in a common cause.

Symptomatically, as the 1940s dawned, our schools delayed opening because of an infantile paralysis epidemic: polio, in itself a unifier. Even the President of the United States was not immune.

There were plenty of "snafus," at war and home. The first casualty of the mobilization came in 1940 when the motorcycle of Pvt. Donald Henry of Rapids was struck by a drunk driver.

And who was that tall man with fencing scars on his left cheek who boarded a train for Milwaukee? Rudolf Karl Wilhelm Weiler, 34, a research chemist at Nekoosa Edwards had been a member of the Nazi Party and didn't want to be labeled a spy so he unsuccessfully tried to join the US Army.

Due to threat of sabotage, state authorities ordered 24-hour guarding of Tri-City airport (Alexander Field). So came the argument between Wisconsin Rapids and the Town of Grand Rapids: who was

supposed to pay for these guards?

Former world heavyweight wrestling champion Ed "Strangler" Lewis was the first Nekoosa man to register in the general registration of men 45-63 years of age. There was almost no chance that he would go.

Bob Newman of Biron wrote to Roosevelt saying he wanted to fight for his country but was rejected. Bob was only 14.

Only nine of 32 selectees for the second March quota of south Wood county were accepted. The others failed their physicals.

The first volunteer to report to the blood-typing center in the former A&P store on West Grand Avenue was Consolidated executive, Stanton W. Mead.

In 1942, three brothers and sisters aged 11, 8 and 7 drowned below the Consolidated dam. They had been left home untended while the father worked at the new defense plant, Badger Ordnance, in the Baraboo Hills.

Meanwhile, Hollywood stars Edward Arnold and Frances Dee appeared at a war bond rally at Witter field.

In 1943, there were scrap drives and Red Cross projects making garments for refugees and soldier kits. Householders removed labels, cleaned and flattened cans, and placed them in curbside container for recycling. School children gathered milkweed for filling life jackets and aviator suits.

Women filled positions formerly held by men, at Griffith state nursery, paper mills and railroads. Jamaicans also harvested farm crops and cranberries.

Police chief Rudy Exner reported juveniles had been stealing cars for joy rides while the owners attended movies, returning the vehicles before the show was over. During a civil defense blackout, Exner took in the view from on top the roof of the Consolidated sulfite mill.

In August 1943, Tri City airport would be used as an Army training base, according to Tech. Sgt. H.G. Collman, who said Wisconsin Rapids was the friendliest community he had ever been in.

In 1944, a state regional planning report suggested the local airport be expanded after the war; a joint Marshfield, Rapids and Stevens Point airport was considered a bad idea.

Republican Presidential primary candidate Wendell Willkie spoke to 4,300 at the field house. He was endorsed by George W. Mead I, who served Willkie breakfast on Belle Isle.

In 1945, some workers were sick of sacrificing for the war effort. At Harvard clothing, a Rapids subsidiary of L.L. Rosenthal, Chicago, 140 left their jobs demanding minimum wage.

Housewives and farmers were busy at the community canning center, many putting up food to be sent overseas: chicken, olives, peanut butter, cake, potato chips and cookies.

Some of the "catsup" was recognized as bourbon. One lady canned and sent to her overseas son his gold wristwatch.

04-21-08

Witter Farm

Onions? The humble herbs don't fit the image of self-described Quality Row "capitalist" J.D. Witter. But yes, the Consolidated founder, financier and lawyer was an onion man. His grandfather was a farmer; so too his father; and he was a farmer. Not surprising that Witter sent a carload or two of crops to market. And that he owned a farm; but on Third Street?

Picturing J.D.'s son, Episcopalian banker Isaac, with manure on his spit-shines, is a challenge. Though he owned the farm, Isaac paid someone to manage it. What better way in the pre-supermarket era to get milk, eggs and bacon?

J.D.'s widow (Isaac's mother) lived on the west side of Third Street South. In 1906 an "old" house and barn were moved from the east side of Third to make room for a new wood and stucco house for Mrs. Witter. Her son, Isaac, meanwhile, planned to remodel the old homestead for himself and his wife, Charlotte. Instead, he tore it down and built, in 1907, what is now the South Wood County Historical Corp. Museum.

Among items Isaac purchased (for \$427) were a team of horses from Paul Musch. His manager, Morris Smith, also bought a couple full blooded Holsteins in Sherry.

In 1917, manager Frank Morrical offered the 9-room Witter farm house on Elm Street for rent as a duplex with "Two lots for gardens." In 1921, Mrs. Morrical threw a 15th birthday party for

daughter Hazel with games, refreshments, candy and a cake.

That year, city officials discussed a continuation of "the street across the Witter farm" but the matter was shelved when Isaac Witter consented to plat the property in the near future and connect Elm and Witter streets.

In May 1923, an auction of personal property on the farm was the first step toward opening the 80 rather boggy acres, "extending down close to the heart of the city." The Witter farm, it was noted, was part of the Neeves addition, a large part of which had been platted by George Neeves, who owned and operated a sawmill near Belle Island behind what was in 1923 the T.W. Brazeau residence.

Advertised were: 15 head of high grade Holstein and Guernsey "milch" cows; a team of work horses; a silo; a John Deere breaking plow; two two-seated buggies with rubber tires; one covered carriage; one single buggy; one two-seated milk wagon with platform spring; two farm wagons; two sets of sleighs; one set of work harness and other personal property.

The following year, 1924, the *Tribune* suggested part of the Witter farm "tract" be flooded for an ice rink. By the end of 1929, the "cut off" street "back of" the Witter farm had been graded but not named.

When the then-new Lincoln high school was being constructed in 1931, dirt fill was spread "at the end of the new road across the old Witter farm from Elm Street."

The offering of 67 building lots in the "Witter farm subdivision" owned by brothers-in-law "Messrs. Isaac P. Witter and George W. Mead" came from Kellogg brothers lumber company in 1935.

Four years later, Kellogg offered for sale one large barn, one small barn and one combination corn crib and shed on the same property. The last hurrah as a farm came in 1943, during World War II. Martin C. Jacobson, secretary of the Wisconsin Rapids Building and Loan association and member of the south Wood county Victory garden committee said 29 acres of the Witter property south of Chestnut street had been made available to be turned into individual plots. Sponsored by the Kiwanis club, 60 gardens were allotted.

In spring of 1944, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. employees who wished to have gardens and did not have room were furnished a plot on the Witter farm. Taking part were about 800 employees of the Wisconsin Rapids division, 300 in Biron, 150 in Appleton and 150 in Stevens Point.

Among the curiosities of Phil Brown's Den of Antiquity is a preliminary plat of the 1926 Witter farm as it was about to be divided into streets and lots. Thus, the property, between Third Street South and "the bluff" were made available for Assumption high school, the First Methodist and First English Lutheran churches and lots of families who don't mind living amongst the faint whiff of J.D. Witter's onions.

05-05-08

Half-Century of Schooling

Seems to me I cried all the way. Despite the company of my fifth-grade mentor, Paul Murgatroyd, I was scared to death.

In 1951, at age six, I matriculated with great reluctance at the four-classroom “state graded” Two Mile school, then at the corner of Two Mile Avenue and Highway 13, about a half mile walk from my home, at which I wished I could have stayed forever in my mother’s arms.

Actually, the Two Mile building used five rooms for educational purposes, if you counted the basement all-purpose area being used for Paul’s class due to the effects of an influx of young families like ours to Grand Rapids township.

I said “Good-bye Two Mile” after four years under Mrs. Schmidt and in 1959 graduated from principal Palmer Budahl’s Grove school, also then a rural graded institution. Ours was the last eighth grade class at Grove. The next year, my sister’s was the first eighth-grade class to graduate from Woodside.

Twelve years after I entered Two Mile School, I graduated from “old” Lincoln high school, now East Junior High. During my checkered career in the hal-lowed halls, beginning under legendary principal Aaron Ritchay, I learned a few things and had a lot of fun.

My sister started at Two Mile a year after me, to begin what was (with the exception of sports) a more distinguished career. Upon her graduation

from LHS in 1964, the former Wood county spelling bee winner was a National Merit Scholar and co-LHS valedictorian.

A brother came along five years later than me. He enjoyed school and became a varsity wrestler on one of Lewie Benitz’ early teams. Another, youngest brother, never outgrew his shyness and suffered through it all.

By the time the last of my siblings graduated from Lincoln in 1973, our Engels had attended local schools for 22 years. Then, the next generation.

My first daughter started kindergarten at Woodside in 1978 and I got to know “our” neighborhood school pretty well again. Mrs. Reichert was more than happy to have me sit in kindergarten classes with both my first and second daughters.

From 1978-1994, the two girls racked up 16 more years for our family in Rapids schools: at Woodside, East Jr. High, Assumption high school and Lincoln, reaching 39 years for the family.

My third daughter started kindergarten in 1995 at Rudolph elementary (on Knowledge Avenue) where my wife became the school librarian.

Daughter three moved on to West Jr. High and the now-venerable but then “new Lincoln.” She graduates this year and that ends it.

Adding her 13 years, I count seven graduates of Lincoln and a collective 52 years that a member of my family has been enrolled in a Wisconsin Rapids school.

We were typical products of a mill

worker’s family culture and of local schools. How did we fare in the thin air of higher education?

Among the four in my generation, we count four masters degrees among three persons and for the fourth a bachelor’s degree. In the second generation, each of the two older daughters have also garnered masters degrees.

For both obvious and perverse reasons, I have often been proud of being “from” Wisconsin Rapids and Lincoln high school and never felt a scholarly disadvantage moving to the next level of the Ivory Tower, whether it be Two Mile to Grove, Grove to Lincoln, Lincoln to UWSP or UWSP to Wyoming, for example.

The graduation of my third and last daughter this year brings the tradition to an end. Her career in the local schools, especially at Lincoln under the disciplined encouragement of retiring principal Gus Mancuso, has been productive, although she is more than ready to move on to the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Her story, one of 444 stories in the class of 2008 and for me, the last chapter of an era.

05-19-08

Memorial Surprise

Not until I saw the flags did I realize it was Friday of Memorial Day weekend. In my private River City, it had been an ordinary evening as my wife and I navigated the river road upstream from Biron to Anchor Bay Bar & Grill. As I ordered the usual Goodhue's Finest, others marked the occasion with a fish fry.

On the return trip, I took Huffman Road south. Past the cranberry bogs, at Highway 54, I saw something I hadn't expected: the flags of Restlawn Memorial Park cemetery. Likewise, my (lack of) plans hadn't included turning into the cemetery and taking the loop past my parents' modest gray granite stone, engraved with the Germanic, "Engel." For myself, I would have chosen the historic green pastures of Forest Hill. But Restlawn became "our" cemetery in the 1960s, when forward-looking citizens of a certain age purchased their own lots.

Platted near the Plover potato plantations, Restlawn is a utilitarian facility: flat, plain, practical and attached to a four-lane highway. It is graced by a view of no mountains, oceans, streams, harbors, historic structures or other scenic complements.

My own plot-to-be and that of my wife came courtesy of my dad and is located "around there somewhere."

Not a regular visitor, I had nevertheless come often to Restlawn to bury friends and relatives or in the company of my brother, Walt, who, during his annual visits brought flowers he had picked.

Where did he want to be buried, I asked Walt — in his beauty-filled Bellingham, Wash., or here, next to the more boring borough of his birth? "As close as possible to Mom and Dad," he said.

On his September 2007 visit, Walt revealed for the first time that he planned to buy a house near mine for his retirement years. "Do you realize how many years from now that is?" I said to my much younger brother. "Do you really think I'll live that long?"

I had not planned on this Memorial Friday to find myself driving around the next loop into the more tranquil acreage of the cemetery away from the highway and to find myself stopping the car.

To my surprise, I was surprised again. "It's Walt," my wife said, as we looked at a grave site not yet identified. Actually, she said, referring to the rectangle of golden sand and straw that encouraged new leaves of grass already green: "It's Ken," using my brother's real name.

I called him "Walt" and he called me "DeWalt," after the yellow-plastic electric-powered tools of that name I bought him as thank you tokens. We especially liked the DeWalt drill that offered a "keyless chuck."

When I had last driven through Restlawn, a hard sheet of snow and ice covered graves that had been filled over the winter. When I actually stood on the spot, under a canopy in cold December 2007, it was for that part of a funeral service that comes before lunch.

Pastor and family friend Ken Hanson prayed with us that day. Walt rested silently nearby, eternal slumber having

been administered by a cerebral hemorrhage. In the hippie days, Walt and I had often joked about "finding your spot," as described in the adventures of Carlos Castaneda and his mentor, don Juan. I was surprised to find that Walt's spot was here in Restlawn.

I was surprised on Memorial Day Friday to think that underfoot was the smartly-crafted wooden coffin Walt had occupied at the Methodist church and at Ritchay funeral home, where I had placed the DeWalt drill in his hand. It would sustain him in the afterlife as well as jars of dried kumquats fed the dead pharaohs of Egypt.

On Memorial Day, my dad used to drive us out to the Seymour, Wis., cemetery to pause at the graves of his dead brother, mother, neighbors, and of Robert, the tumbleweed uncle who had been shipped back from the wild west on the same tracks as Walt. Robert's spot was silent, mossy and mysterious.

It was only Friday but at Restlawn other kin of other brothers were already arriving in the Memorial ritual I had by chance joined.

I wondered if any of them heard what I heard, the sound of a small electric motor below. I don't want to frighten any precocious youngsters who might be reading this, so I will admit I only imagined it, as I imagined myself calling, "Walt!" and hearing what we had made a familiar response.

"DeWalt!"

06-02-08

Field House

There is a reason the generic big box that passes for the “new” Lincoln gym doesn’t excite me and fellow members of the worst generation. For graduation 1963, we had the Lincoln Field House. Finding that so many of the kielbasa we sliced in the past were big bologna, we wonder if the Field House stands up to the taste test.

In 1963, the Field House and high school counted 31 years of history, lore and legend, only a couple more than the present high school gym. Other than a modest antiquity, what made the original more than a run of mill jock shop?

A few concrete examples come to mind: balconies that ran the length of both sides of the interior; a dirt track that emitted an earthy musk underneath canvas; and a stage at one end big enough for intramural basketball games and noon-hour dances.

The Field House, which we called “the gym,” was revered as host to events of community importance, such as basketball tournaments, Harlem Globetrotters, Sport Shows, Home Shows, Stunt Nights, big band shows and political appearances that included the likes of Robert F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon.

On the dark side, like most gymnasiums, the joint was bad-mouthed for bad lighting, poor acoustics and uncomfortable seating.

The class of 1931 was the first to hold graduating exercises in the Field House although it had actually attended the still-standing “Old Lincoln” next door. The world at large was just into the

Great Depression but River City was enjoying an expansive moment with what was then, at 162, the largest senior class in history.

When the Field House and new Lincoln High School was dedicated by Mayor George W. Mead, it was the largest and best of its kind outside of Madison and the crowning achievement of Mead’s administration.

Number one citizen George W. Mead I had been elected mayor in 1926 for the first of three terms. In 1928, he was appointed a regent of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate.

In 1929, a committee recommended hiring Childs & Smith of Chicago as architects, planning that the building be for a junior-senior high school and that it be constructed adjacent to the “old” Lincoln, which was the result.

Appearing for the May 26, 1931, dedication were the Lincoln high school band and the UW-Madison concert band. Mrs. J.D. (Priscilla, wife of “young Jere”) Witter, president of the Presto club, added piano solos.

The family affair continued with George Mead’s brother-in-law and Jere’s father, Isaac P. Witter, a class of 1891 alumnus of the local high school, then named Howe.

A University of Southern California professor delivered the main address and LHS student MacKinnon Lansdowne added remarks. Mead also spoke, on “school and community.”

Mead was joined in his efforts by

community leaders, including William F. Huffman, publisher of the *Daily Tribune*, who may be the author, on May 26, 1931, of a highly affirmative editorial.

“This magnificent building, containing all the latest equipment and educational features and marvelous new field house, constitutes a community asset which excels any other in the history of the city. Possessed of beautiful homes, churches, public buildings and efficient, well-designed and constructed industrial plants, there remained only the erection of this beautiful and most efficient high school plant to round out the community possessions and services. The building is a monument to the community which it serves. It stands for the faith of our citizens in our city and is a pledge to the coming generation that it shall receive at the hands of the city the finest educational facilities within command of a city of this size or even larger.

“No community two to three times the size of this could do more. None had done more for its school children than we have.”

The editorial credited Mead and the city administration but emphasized that the project was the product of cooperation and inspiration among the community involving: the school board; board president I.E. Wilcox; Guy Nash, chairman of the special committee, and his committeemen; architects Childs & Smith; and general contractor Frank J. Henry.

The Field House; you had to love it.

06-16-08

Papermaker Blues

Job well done. The last 13 bricklayers lay down their trowels, punched out one last time and drew their wages. A happy crew, according to a reporter, more so because “the best of feelings between employer and employee had existed during the whole progress of the work.”

The occasion was completion of brick work on the pulp and paper mill of the John Edwards Mfg. Co., Port Edwards, Wis., in November 1896. Soon the big wheels would be turn turn turning: two paper machines, grinders, wet machines, wood room, beater room, boiler house, machine room, engine room, finishing room and machine shop.

Prior to the Port Edwards paper complex, a big sawmill on the site had been owned by W.A. Scott, Chicago, and L.M. Alexander, Port Edwards. But the big white pines had been cut by the Gay Nineties and there wasn’t much to saw.

When Scott retired, Alexander joined John McNaughton of Appleton, Wis. (an investor in Nekoosa Paper Co.) and Frank Garrison of the South Centralia mill, to erect “mammoth pulp and paper mills” on “one of the best water powers on the river.”

The new Port mill was part of a boom that would define the River Cities for generations: at South Centralia, the first paper mill on the Wisconsin (and the first to go); the 1896 Grand Rapids pulp and paper company mill at Biron (later part of Consolidated); and “mammoth sulphite mills” added to Nekoosa Paper

Co., Nekoosa, (later merged with Port). In 1903, Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. finally built its world headquarters at Grand Rapids.

Soon, the Nekoosa Papers Co. joined the Edwards firm and a bright new office building was added for bright new executives and Port Edwards became the White City, by reputation the richest little village in the state. So many millionaires per capita!

For the more typical sons and daughters of employees, it was a 112-year family tradition to “get in the mill.” Once “in,” you were, for better or worse, married to a lifetime job.

What happened?

After a while the orb of fortune turned and turned again as fortune spun off from the “hardest working” Fox and Wisconsin rivers. “Our” companies were sold to and/or bought by big conglomerates from other states and big conglomerates from other countries and by big conglomerates that *were* other countries.

Friday was to be the last day and by now, Monday, June 29, 2008, the big wheels ground to a halt and the Port mill is shut down, perhaps forever.

What happened?

The paper mills were built here in “the Pinery” to take advantage of a gold mine of natural resources: trees not suitable for lumber; water and water power that was among the best anywhere; and cheap, hardworking, non-union immigrant labor. It was the global economy of the 19th and 20th Centuries and the workers were following the money, from French Canada, England, Ireland,

Poland, Germany and Scandinavia.

We in mid-Wis still have plenty of trees but the labor is no longer immigrant nor cheap and someone has taken the river out of River City. Water power doesn’t matter so much any more.

What about the descendants of those early European immigrants who so often prefer to be close to family? When the gold mine closes, what happens to the miners?

Grandchildren Tyler and Ashley, like Ole and Lena, the great-great-grandparents before them, must follow the money; because money makes the global economy turn turn turn. The same global CEO that sees us as the third world riverside village.

Consider a random sample of globalisms: “Morgan Stanley Private Equity Asia has combined with Shinhan Private Equity to acquire the South Korean subsidiary of Norway-based paper company Norske Skogindustrier for 3.2bn Norwegian kroner (€400m).”

Do you like the “zero sum game,” where some gotta win, some gotta lose? If a mill opens in Puerto Nuevo, one closes in Port Edwards, according to plan, for the global exec.

Closer to home, at the end, it was a job well done. The last 13 papermakers laid down their knives, punched out one last time and compared health insurance options. The big wheels had moved offices to Canada and opened a gold mine down in that South Korean town, to paraphrase the bard, where the workers work almost for nothing.

06-30-08

Judge Connor

Who knew we had an old-time judge named “Craig”? He is notable because his portrait was discovered this year to be the only one missing from the pantheon of circuit court judges at the courthouse.

Though his name was unusual here, it was a long time favorite in Scotland, ancestral home of Craig’s family, the Connors. He was the son of Robert and Robert’s second wife, Rebecca Waite Connor, a native of Canada. Robert and his brothers, John and James, had founded the village of Auburndale and a lumbering dynasty along with it.

Born July 15, 1887, Craig Prentice Connor was 29 years old when he registered for selective service. It was 1916 and the U.S. was about to be drawn into World War I. Not likely that the blond, brown-eyed, single, short and stout Craig Connor would be a soldier soon. The Auburndale resident was a paralyzed “invalid.”

He only lived another 12 years, dying Sept. 27, 1928, at age 41.

A *Daily Tribune* obituary said County Judge Connor died at his 323 Drake Street home, Wisconsin Rapids, after a brief illness with influenza, which resulted in congestion of the lungs. “A generous judge himself, Craig P. Connor has gone to face the Great Judge whom we all must some day face to have our merits and shortcomings passed upon.”

Connor had held court a few days earlier but had become a victim of a

world-wide influenza epidemic only the week before his death; but he had been struck down long ago. “When still young in life Craig P. Connor was visited by an illness which left him with severe physical handicap forcing him to spend the balance of his life in a wheel chair.” That illness was infantile paralysis—polio.

Connor had been appointed by Governor Blaine to fill the unexpired term of W. J. Conway. He was elected to the judgeship at a special election in April 1925. Connor, “a judge of the shortcomings of frail human life, marked his entire career in office by his patience and tolerance toward the unfortunates who were brought to him to have judgment rendered.”

As a youngster, Connor had attended school in Marshfield. He was president of the 1907 senior class and toastmaster for an annual banquet honoring seniors: “The responses were exceptionably able, each prefaced with a pointed allusion from the toastmaster.”

The 1910 U.S. census for Auburndale shows Craig’s mother, Rebecca, 52, as head of the family. Ruth, a sister attending Normal school, was the same age as Craig, who was enrolled in law school. Another brother, Wallace, was in military school.

At the University of Wisconsin, Craig Connor appeared in the 1913 “Badger” bearing the nicknames of “Sinkers” and “Ralph.” He had participated in Philomathian (debate), Freshman Blow-out and Sophomore Semi-public International Club. His thesis was “Deeds in

Escrow, in Wisconsin.”

According to the “Badger,” Connor, “A justice with grave justices shall sit. He praises their wisdom; they admire his wit.”

Connor started a law practice in Wausau that later took him back home in 1915 to Auburndale, where he specialized in probate matters and operated a business in real estate and insurance. He was village president and village clerk.

In 1920, Craig, 32, lived with his brother, Reuben, 40, Reuben’s family, and a hired girl, Matilda Dillinger, 22. “His political trend is Republican, but he is not a strong party man, voting independently whenever he sees good reason.”

Connor’s continued illness caused indefinite postponement of the term of county court. Although having suffered from “an affliction of several weeks’ duration,” he was not thought to be seriously ill.

Craig Connor was survived by his wife, the former Marie Schill of Auburndale. He had four sisters and four brothers who would achieve a great deal of success in the world of big trees and kitchen cabinets: Reuben of Auburndale, W.D. of Marshfield and Robert of Ironwood, Mich.

07-14-08

Educate Your Brains

Used primarily to disguise Christmas presents, there was nothing my mother took more pride in than her shorthand. And her session at Oshkosh Business College where she learned it. As the daughter of hardscrabble dairy farmers, any other institute of higher learning was out of the question. She borrowed enough for Oshkosh from her dad who probably borrowed it somewhere else. Because of business school, Mom was later able to become a part-time bookkeeper here for Haney Drugs, the Methodist church and Ridges golf course.

Would you believe we also had a business college right here in River City?

In charge was "Prof." Earl L. Hayward, previously an instructor at Stevens Point Business College. He had moved to Rapids when he became head bookkeeper in the Oberbeck Mfg. Co., a furniture factory.

After a year at Oberbeck, Hayward founded the Rapids institute. Also involved was "Prof." W.W. Williams of Appleton, who supervised the January 1905 opening in the "old city hall or library building."

Both a night and day school would be conducted and the elementary branches of English taught, the latter to be the same course taught at the School of Commerce at Lawrence University, Appleton, Wis. Williams would be dropping by every two weeks to supervise.

Evening school in September 1905 was pitched to "those employed during the day and who desire to increase their usefulness and earning power by acquiring a practical business education. Many successful men and women owe their success to the training received in evening school."

College classes taught the same skills my mother had specialized in: Penmanship, Spelling, Business Arithmetic, Rapid Calculation, Bookkeeping, Shorthand, Typewriting, Letterpress Copying and Manifolding (making copies). Plain Business Writing was a specialty.

Can you paddle your own canoe? So inquired a Business College ad in the *Daily Tribune*. Competition for "honorable positions" was stronger every year and the Business Course or The Course in Shorthand and Typewriting would be the ticket to a "good paying position."

Getting and keeping students for the college was competitive with so many similar enterprises in the vicinity.

In August 1905, Hayward accompanied Frank Hamilton, "the Hancock jeweler," on Hamilton's regular trip to Coloma, "soliciting students for the Grand Rapids Business College, of which he is proprietor."

"Educate Your Brains," urged the college in 1907. "Get a salary-earning education. Then you will have something to sell for which there always will be A LARGE DEMAND." The Grand Rapids ad promised splendid new equipment, excellent location, pleasant rooms and teachers with actual business

experience. "They know what business men want."

Tuition for six months was \$40. The school was promoted and endorsed by the City Council and Business Men's Association of Grand Rapids, also by A. Decker in his 1907 "Along the Wisconsin River" booklet.

The largest enrollment in history, said Decker, had moved into "large and commodious quarters" in a new brick building on the East Side. The staff of three included Hayward, "an experienced commercial and shorthand teacher," Ira Wood, "the thoroughly qualified and painstaking assistant in the Commercial department and Miss Mabel Hamilton, English and shorthand teacher."

I don't know what happened to the business college but it, a business itself, probably went broke. Hayward seems to have moved on to a teaching job at Lincoln high school. In 1930 he was in Chicago, an "investment salesman."

In 1936, Hayward and the missus, came up from Oak Park, Ill., to visit her father, F.C. Wood.

Hayward died Sept. 26, 1965, at Racine. He was 88.

Footnote to history: the SWCHC Museum last week received a shoe worn by Emily Mead at her marriage to Henry Baldwin. By coincidence, Hayward and his daughter Viola, in 1928, visited with Dr. and Mrs. E.J. Clarke here and attended the very same Mead-Baldwin wedding.

07-28-08

Dutch Mill

Will the gentlemen who picked up the silver ZIPPO LIGHTER with initials J.S.H. at Dutch Mill Tavern between 6 and 6:30 Thursday evening please return same and collect \$5.00 reward from Jack Stinchfield at General Mills. It's a war memento."

Stinchfield's cigarette lighter was likely a "memento" of World War II; the ad was in the *Daily Tribune* of Sept. 9, 1946, a little more than a year after the surrender of Japan.

Whoever walked off with the Zippo could return it to the 131 3rd Ave. S. location in 1946 of the Dutch Mill, later the address of Buzz's Bar. Now it identifies a vacant building.

Buzz's Bar has had two locations. At its later spot at 131 Third, its predecessor was the Dutch Mill Tavern. I recall making an informal survey of Rapids bars in the 1960s and finding the Mill a typical neighborhood joint.

In 1934, it was open for good times.

A "Hallowe'en Party" offered music, confetti and novelties: "eats and mixed drinks our specialty." The location, "Next to Palace Theatre," placed it in the West Side entertainment district.

"WHOOPEE!"

A "big" New Year's Eve party with more fine eats, good music, "mixed drinks of all kinds properly made" ended 1934 with a bang.

In January 1935, 30 friends gathered at the Dutch Mill in honor of Miss Lucy Kohnen, a bride-to-be.

A June 1937 list of applications for liquor licenses included "Bouton and Gee" at 231 Second St. S. and Walter Walloch (or "Wallock") for 131 Third Ave. S.

A 1937 city directory named the "Little Dutch Mill" at 131 Third. The 1941 version calls it "Dutch Mill," owned by Walter Wallock.

Running a bar means a series of unfortunate incidents in your vicinity for which the newspaper will mention you from time to time.

In July 1943, Joe Jefferson, 28, a "colored carnival worker who gave Minneapolis as his home," was sentenced in Justice Jacobson's court to a week in county jail, having created a disturbance at the Dutch Mill at 7:15 on a Sunday night, strongly resisting efforts of police to place him in the squad car.

On Jan. 9, 1953, Paul Cockerell, operator of the tavern, was charged with having in his possession "a refilled container which had previously been used for intoxicating liquor," perhaps now holding a diluted beverage of lesser value.

In May 1956, smoke filled the Dutch Mill. A (coal?) stoker hadn't been filled, allowing smoke to filter out through the "feeder worm gear mechanism." In August 1969, city police investigated a burglary reported by owner Irv Baumgart, in which \$120 was stolen, entry gained the usual way, by breaking a rear window.

Ervin Baumgart died at age 60 in 1972 of a heart attack (funeral at St. Lawrence Catholic and burial in Calvary Ceme-

tery). Born in Colby, Wis., he had been employed by Preway Inc. for 28 years and ran Dutch Mill for six years, retiring in 1971.

Another burglary meant \$175 taken from the cash register and the thief sentenced by Fred A. Fink to two years in the State Reformatory, Green Bay. It was followed by a similar conviction of another burglar in 1973.

In November 1975, a 34-year-old Rapids man was arrested at 12:34 a.m. and charged with disorderly conduct for swearing at officers who were called to remove him from the tavern.

In the summer of 1976, Michael, a notable early rock and roller, was apprehended and returned to Norwood Health Center, Marshfield. A couple decades later, the Dutch Mill was Buzz's and Michael was temporarily unshackled again, lookin' cowboy good, and sharing a drunken version of the life-gone-wrong song. I'm glad I was there to hear it.

08-11-08

Buzz's

You made it seem like a church, my dad said, not as a compliment. My July 1, 1982, rhapsody in the *Daily Tribune* had celebrated a unique Buzz's Bar reunion at Robinson Park, in honor of owners Buzz and Lucille "Sis" Bouton and attended by hundreds of the little Buzzes that had bellied up to the beer-only bar on West Grand Avenue.

The shot of Buzz and Sis I snapped that day hung on the wall of "new Buzz's" for a long time. Another photo in the *Tribune*, showed my friend, James C. Nuhlicek, a former Buzz's bartender, perched on a bar stool borrowed from new Buzz's on the site of old Buzz's in front of present City Hall.

New Buzz's was a friend-and-family bar in which all the Boutons would be seen occasionally, including daughters Marcia, Kathleen and Janice. The recently-retired (2008) "Young Buzz," a.k.a. "Old Geno," was in the single digits when big brother Farnum Jr. put in his stint behind the old bar, playing sheephead and ignoring customers.

My first visit to Buzz's came on Aug. 12, 1963, the night I "turned 18." As I downed several "Bud taps" on a stultifying Monday night, I wondered where the action was. I had almost fallen asleep with my head on the bar when Old Buzz himself, Farnum Sr., said, if I was so tired I should go home.

But the joint, much livelier in my mill working years, became my home away from home. You could tell I was there

by my '57 Ford Batmobile (so banged up the handles had to be tied together across the front seat to keep the doors shut).

On busy summer nights, Buzz sometimes asked me to tend bar. In winter, when I was hard up for cash at Point college, I could drive down to Buzz's and borrow \$10. Not only did he ask no questions, but Buzz never complained that I took the money and went back to Point to spend it.

In 1998, Sis told me how Buzz had come up from Peoria, Ill., and she had come down from Arpin, meeting in Rapids. Buzz was working at his brother Red's Dixie Bar. Their first date was dancing at the Venetian tavern.

They were married Jan. 19, 1939, and during World War II lived in Manitowoc while Buzz worked at the submarine shipyards, as my father had.

Back in Rapids, the Boutons rented the Ranch House root beer stand at 151 Seventh Ave., "behind the Hiawatha tavern." In a *Daily Tribune* for 1953 appeared a Christmas wish from the Ranch House, "courtesy Buzz, Sis and the staff."

The *Tribune* also noted the 1954 purchase by "Mr. and Mrs. Farnum Bouton, former operators of Buzz's Ranch House Drive-In" of the Red Ball Café, 147 Fourth Ave. N., from Mrs. William Obermeier.

In 1960, said Sis, "Buzz went over to see if he could get a beer license and got one right away." That allowed sale of beer only, to anyone over 18. The Boutons rented and converted the Ro-

manski building, a former grocery store, and celebrated with an ad in the Nov. 26, 1960, *Tribune*: "Get Acquainted with the Owner of Wisconsin Rapid's Newest Tavern...Buzz's Bar, 440 West Grand Avenue. Buzz is always happy to welcome all his friends, new and old, at any time. Stop in tonight for that beverage of your choice."

"We were in there 12 ½ years," Sis said, "And then we went out of business for a while."

After the semi-retirement of Buzz and Sis, old Buzz's became the Cell Block bar for a short time, owned by George Dallman.

For six years, Sis and Buzz worked various jobs until, in 1978, they bought the Dutch Mill Tavern and called it Buzz's. The new place was not a beer bar but a traditional "liquor bar" and lunch spot featuring, most recently, soup by Cheryl O'Keefe, and the award-winning Buzz Burger.

When Farnum "Buzz" Bouton died in 1986, his wife, Sis, and son, Gene, carried on until this summer.

Other notable personages tending bar at both the old and new Buzz's were my classmates, Craig Skibba and George Zimmerman slamming the dice box from hot summer nights in 1960s to winter Thursdays in the New Millennium.

Another buddy and bartender, Bruce Zanow, used to close up Buzz's with a command that seems pretty apt then and now. "You don't have to go home," he liked to say, "but you can't stay here."

08-25-08

Wrong George Mead

Who would have thought there was a wrong George Mead? A few years ago, I investigated the historical museum of Thunder Bay, Ontario, in search of clues relating to George W. Mead I and his fabled Canadian paper mill.

Because I set up the meeting in advance, the curator retrieved several boxes of documents that seemed to be what I was looking for: George Mead, paper mill, Thunder Bay (city resulting from the 1970 joining of Fort William and Port Arthur). But as I poked around in files and folders, nothing looked familiar.

Yes, the papers showed, Fort William Paper Company Limited began producing paper in 1923 at what is now Thunder Bay. Yes, the papers showed, George Mead built the Fort William Paper Co. mill and George Mead, of course, happened to be the name of the leading industrialist and citizen of our “River City.”

But in the museum documents I found the wrong George Mead and the wrong River City. Not G.W. Mead but G.H. Mead; not Consolidated but Mead Pulp and Paper Co. and Management Engineering and Developing (M.E.A.D.) of Chillicothe, Ohio, USA.

In 1928, this Wrong George firm was taken over by the ever-expanding Canadian conglomerate Abitibi Power and Paper Company Limited. During the 1930s, production fluctuated due to world conditions and some paper mills shut down. Even Abitibi struggled with

bankruptcy. Then, according to a 1952 account, came expanding opportunities in newsprint and a need to preserve Canadian timberland from competition, causing another wave of mill building.

Then there’s the story of Real George, a.k.a. George W. Mead, “Wisconsin” Mead, to distinguish him from Ohio Mead.

By chance, former resident Jim Natwick recently provided the SWCHC Museum with the scrapbook of Clarence E. Jackson, former mill manager at Wisconsin Rapids Division. Jackson’s own account said the first entry of Consolidated into Thunder Bay came in 1922 with the purchase of Kaministiquia Pulp and Paper, meant to supply ground wood for paper mills at Wisconsin Rapids and Biron.

In 1924, “Thunder Bay Pulp & Paper Co.” was further expanded and the tug “Butterfield” employed to tow two former car ferries filled with pulp across Lake Superior to Ashland.

The paper mill came thanks to a huge timber grant from the Canadian government, said Jackson, making it possible for Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. to manufacture newsprint paper in Port Arthur, beginning in 1927. Jackson was appointed to supervise the operation.

In a familiar ritual, the Port Arthur citizenry fell all over themselves kissing up to the foreigners (us!) and passing favo(u)rable by-laws, “evidence of a sincere Canadian welcome.”

Some of the Rapids employees involved in the Thunder Bay project were

W.F. Thiele, W.E. Beadle, Fred Fisher, Henry Hahner, Otto Mittelsteadt, Albert Zager, F.A. Drumb and Earl McCourt, many chosen by Walter L. Mead, personnel manager of Consolidated.

The plan was that finished paper rolls would be transported to a proposed warehouse on the lake front and be transferred to ships during navigation season and to railway cars in winter.

Upon its construction, Consolidated bragged up the Thunder Bay mill as an “institution standing proudly” within the big Consolidated organization. And it fulfilled the “governing thought” of the Consolidated ideal, to do all things well.

Despite all that, only a year after Consolidated built the Thunder Bay mill, they sold it, to the same Abitibi that had bought the Mission mill from the other Mead. It was said that the resulting capital carried Consolidated through the Depression.

Back in Wisconsin Rapids at the cusp of the New Millennium, George W. Mead’s Consolidated sold its properties to the Finnish/Swedish multi-national Stora Enso Oyj which sold to NewPage Corp. of Ohio.

NewPage happens to be a continuation in complex form of the company of guess who? George H. Mead, the same Wrong Mead who confused the curator and me by building a paper mill in Thunder Bay in the 1920s.

That’s how, in a quirk of history, George Mead owns Consolidated again, sort of.

09-08-08

Bast Washes from Maverick

Football Saturday 2002. After the last of a short line of buyers drifted away with autographed copies of *Worth the Fighting For: A Memoir*, we had Prairie Lights, the independent Iowa City bookstore, to ourselves.

Me and the author, an old war hero, U.S. senator and failed presidential candidate, who sat alone at a small table in the back corner of a back room, concentrating on a paper-wrapped sandwich. He sipped from a paper cup and frequently wiped his puffy, scarred face. This was my only opportunity, so I broke in with a bit of lame information: "I'm from Wisconsin."

The author set aside his lunch and accepted the book I handed to him for signing, and said, conclusively, "Russ Feingold, he's an honest man." The Democrat from the Dairy State and the author had been yoked for history in the "Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002."

I nodded while he signed *Worth the Fighting For* with what looked like, "T. Dxve wun bast washes. John McCue." It was meant to be, "John McCain."

His work done, the author made his way unbothered out into the Iowa October homecoming football weekend. Across S. Dubuque Street, students spilled themselves and their beers from a college bar, yelling, jumping around, as "McCue" had in his own youth.

But there was no party that day in Iowa for the author. No handlers, no entourage, no press, no body guards; there was no secret service. Just a lone super-

annuated gunslinger limping away: a wounded bear ... or a ground squirrel ... or a maverick.

It started with Samuel Augustus Maverick, born 1803 in South Carolina. He graduated from Yale, went into business, studied law, ran his father's plantation. In 1835, Maverick began buying large tracts of land in Texas with which he became closely identified. He signed the Texas declaration of independence and became mayor of San Antonio where his son was the first Anglo-American to be born.

Maverick left the Alamo just before it was over-run by Mexican soldiers and Maverick's friends inside perished. Similarly, in 1839, he left a surveying camp just before a Comanche massacre that led him to join the militia.

In 1842, Mexico sent troops into Texas and Maverick joined Texas army troops. After San Antonio was forced to surrender, Maverick and others were captured and forced to march into Mexico, where they slept in manure-filled sheep pens and were chained together for hard labor while receiving almost no food.

On behalf of the company, Maverick complained to the Mexican captors and was rewarded with solitary confinement. While imprisoned in 1843, he was elected to the Texas congress. Maverick was offered freedom several times if he would publicly support Mexico's claim to Texas but refused, saying he regarded lying as a crime, "and one which I cannot commit even to secure my release."

With the onset of the War Between the States, Maverick, a sometimes slave

owner, chose secession and the confederacy. He negotiated with U.S. Army General David E. Twiggs for peaceful surrender of Federal garrisons in Texas.

It was the same Twiggs who, in 1829, with the help of Lt. Jefferson Davis, had built Ft. Winnebago at Portage and confiscated the shingles of trespasser and pinery lumberman Daniel Whitney on the Yellow River to preserve Indian land.

After the Civil War, Maverick helped John H. Reagan organize the Texas Democratic Party. He was rewarded with the naming of Maverick County, Texas.

Sam Maverick wasn't much interested in cattle raising and, after a couple year, sold his large herd to Toutant Beauregard, who rounded up all the stray unbranded calves he could find, including a large number belonging to other ranchers and branded them for himself. The newly-tattooed bovines were known as "Maverick's," and although Sam left the business, Texas cowboys continued to use his name for loose cattle. Gradually the term was enlarged to include "anyone who could not be trusted to remain on his group" or "someone who exhibits a streak of stubborn independence."

In Iowa City, the author of "A Memoir" indeed seemed a bit stubborn as he trudged the lonesome prairies in football season, his POW suffering over, his politicking days seemingly past, his battles fought and mostly lost, hoping perhaps that it was all worth fighting for.

09-22-08

Documenting the Columbian

Dick Goldamer. First, birdbaths. Pedestals from the old Grand Avenue Bridge (1922-1986) to which he added molded-concrete saucers, sold successfully as a fund raiser for the cause of historical preservation.

Now, Goldamer and Port Edwards historian J. Marshall Buehler have made available a CD composed of video Goldamer shot when he worked at the now-dormant Port paper mill (formerly owned by Nekoosa Papers Inc. and most lately by Domtar of Montreal, Quebec).

In the "Port mill," he worked on and documented the celebrated "Columbian" paper machine, which spun its final web on the "perfect-running" day when his partner, Ed Hasenhorl, relieved Goldamer and shut down the machine at 8:05 p.m., June 26, 2008.

The Columbian was so-named because it had been displayed and operated at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the machine was purchased by the Nekoosa Paper Co. for its new mill at Nekoosa.

As he had numerous times in the 1980s, when we discussed bridges and birdbaths, Goldamer stopped by the South Wood County Historical Museum recently and told me about his papermaking years.

Like generations of paper machine operators, he had started as fifth hand and worked up through fourth hand, third hand, back tender and machine tender over a total of 38 years.

It's a way of life I got a glimpse of in the 1960s when I finished an apprenticeship on a paper machine. The pay was \$2.22 per hour, which was the best in town.

When he started in 1970, Goldamer said, he was receiving \$2.37 an hour. When he left the Port mill last summer, he was making \$28.03 an hour.

The mill had a different feel in the early days, Goldamer said. Perhaps it was the legacy of the affable John E. Alexander, who died in 1963. Alexander was the grandson of John Edwards Jr., resident founder of Port Edwards. "When I first started there in 1970, at holidays, the management from the main office would actually come down and shake your hand and wish you a lot of luck. Merry Christmas and Happy Thanksgiving, whatever, and ask how everything was. The head management was very concerned about you; they took care of you like you were somebody. Gerry Veneman would come down and shake your hand. Sam Casey would come down. They'd all greet you."

As ownership drifted further from home, the inevitable impersonality set in. "Georgia Pacific was not as good as Nekoosa Papers because Nekoosa Papers had still been family owned. GNN [Great Northern Nekoosa], it was kind of a partnership but it was still family; it was still connected. But when GP came in, then we started seeing less and less from the management and then when Domtar first walked in, it was pretty good but at the end, it was

strictly business. You come to work, they push a button, they'd start you. When you were done work in the afternoon, they pushed a button and you would stop."

Goldamer doesn't see as clear a future for the industry here as the past that provided his livelihood and that of most of central Wisconsin. "That's another problem. When the mills take an old machine out and, instead of scrapping it, they turn around and sell it. So what they do is ship it over to Japan or ship it over to Thailand or South America or China and they set the machines up and they put the people to work and they probably pay them 50 cents an hour and then they ship the paper back to the United States and what is it doing?

"My job. That's what's happening. It's sad to see."

Fortunately for students of papermaking history, Goldamer had the foresight to capture and preserve not only a chapter in his own work history but that of one of the machines that pioneered the greatest of Wisconsin River industries.

10-06-08

Hard Times On Grand

You know the story, or you think you do. How it had once been, as journalist Bill Granger said, a city of industry, conservatism, complacency, full employment, lunch buckets and good beer.

Maybe the beer wasn't all that good but if you drank enough of it, it got better. And maybe it wasn't the 1990s that were so industrious, conservative and complacent; but the 1950s.

And maybe the point of view wasn't now but March 1971, when former resident Granger characterized our River City for the *Chicago Sun-Times* as "Microcosm, U.S.A." "The trouble with Wisconsin Rapids...is the same trouble you find everywhere else: war, poverty, drugs, dissatisfied teenagers and social change. But for this central Wisconsin paper-mill town, all these problems are new—and very frightening..."

"Ecology has become a familiar word there now, and they say some high school kids have discovered pot. The first teachers' strike has come and gone, law and order is an issue, the young long for the excitement of a city, the paper mill is laying off workers. And the people of Wisconsin Rapids are disturbed and wondering where it's all going to end."

The previous autumn, the first of 245 were laid off "at Consolidated," reaching nearly a tenth of the work force. In an increasingly anti-pollution atmosphere, *Daily Tribune* editor Joe Karius averred, "You'll find Consolidated doesn't have a lot of people coming to their defense

any more."

But Consolidated head George W. Mead II, according to Granger, had grown up in Rapids and loved the city and its people. He told Granger that, yes, the paper industry was in a recession and that, by necessity, overtime had been cut, men were laid off and some were retired early.

Rapids mayor Donald Penza, in the middle of a second term, said, "We've got a downtown that is in trouble and now we've got the layoffs at the mills. We're gonna lose those families and we need them and it comes as a shock here."

Jack Griffith, Consoweld employee and bartender at the Hiawatha bar, said he, a WWII vet, had supported the then-ongoing Viet Nam war but had turned against it because we had never intended to win. As for the social revolution, maybe the Communists were behind it but, mused Griffith, "I know they aren't wasting their time on a little town like Rapids."

"You see a kid with long hair or he don't want to work, well, he just has come out of the Army and you got to give him time to find himself. Some people forget it was that way for us when we got out of service, too." In regard to the political situation, Griffith said, "I still can't understand how a man can be a family man and go to church and be a working man and be a Republican."

His wife, Theresa, retorted, "Jack! Republicans go to church, too."

Cliff Parrott, forced into early retirement, said he felt sorry for younger men

who were going to leave town because there weren't jobs. An Army veteran at Brauer's clothing store, where Parrott worked, told Granger this is a great town to grow up in and a great town to grow old in but "There's nothing in between and I'm leaving the first chance I get."

Father Andrew Karoblis of SS. Peter and Paul: "I told people here for two years times won't always be good and now it's come. The whole life of this town centers around the mills and they made the mills their god. This is a closed town. There are small societies in it. I am trying to prepare the people for the day when Negroes move here to this town."

At the Elks club, district attorney Harold La Chapelle said he would welcome more blacks in the area. He also said pollution had been abated. "Hell, I swim in the river now, it's been cleaned up that much, but I wouldn't have 20 years ago."

"The mills have been good for this town, there's jobs here, this is a good place to live and bring up a family. Kids saying now that they want to move away from town—well, when I was growing up, we said the same things. And we did move and when we got a family, we moved back to town."

After all, Granger said, change is not all bad. As a case in point, he noted that a police sergeant thought there was "less window peepin'"—since the topless places went in.

10-20-08

Politics 1958

50 years ago, my mother-in-law's Marshfield high school pal was well on his way to becoming one of the most influential politicians from central Wisconsin. He is Melvin R. Laird, former Congressman, secretary of defense and still a prominent figure here and in Washington D.C. Her name was Kathryn Kenney, a school teacher to be.

In October 1958, the Republican member of the House of Representatives told the 1,100 students of Lincoln High School here that he favored lowering the voting age to 18: "Young people today have the education and maturity to make adequate decisions regarding the people who represent them." Laird also said he favored grants and fellowships for education rather than loans. "We have had a student loan program here in Wisconsin for over 20 years, but it has been used very little."

In a non-Presidential year, on the ballot, besides Laird, were: for governor, (Republican) Vernon W. Thomson vs. (Democrat) Gaylord A. Nelson; lieutenant governor, Warren P. Knowles vs. Philleo Nash of Wisconsin Rapids; U.S. Senator, Roland J. Steinle vs. William Proxmire; and a host of local candidates with familiar names, including Arthur J. Crowns, Jr., Arthur H. Treutel, Adrian G. Elvod, Harold E. Fitzgerald, Byron T. Adams, Thomas H. Forsyth, Jasper C. Johnson, Morgan L. Midthun, Robert P. Bender, Robert J. Ryan and Thomas J. Ruesch.

Already the 1960 Presidential election was a hot topic. Incumbent Vice President Richard M. Nixon was (with president and general Dwight D. Eisenhower out of the race), the one to beat for the Republican nomination. There was going to be fierce competition for the Democratic slot now that victory was possible.

The early favorite, as the *Tribune* saw it, was Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. "Ever since his gracious, sportsmanlike acceptance of defeat for the vice presidential nomination in 1956, he has been in tremendous demand everywhere," said the *Tribune*. "Shrewd observers in Washington say he had markedly added to his stature by his Senate performance in recent years. He has his critics, especially among certain militant liberals. Reservations are heard expressed because he is a Catholic. But none of this seems to lessen his basic position materially ... He stirs excitement wherever he goes among his fellow Democrats and beyond."

While Laird appeared here, Philleo Nash, of Rapids, Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor, was in Laird's Marshfield, speaking to a government class at Columbus high school. Nash praised the class members for their interest in practical politics and said that, frequently, "young people are more idealistic than their parents, and therefore it is doubly rewarding to see a high school government class match its idealism with practical experience."

A political figure in Rapids, who did not run for office, wrote to the *Daily*

Tribune from Belle Isle, responding to Nash's complaints about some "spurious literature" that "none of us good Republicans ever heard of."

The Republicans, she said, put out their own literature, "telling of the accomplishment of 20 years of good government. We have facts to rely on, and a record of honesty and efficiency that needs no embellishments of the imagination."

"Not so the Democratic Party. We Republicans often run into wild pamphlets and even books, written and peddled by our opposition. One famous book making almost insane accusations was definitely presented to us by the Democratic Party. Two years ago, a horrid pamphlet was circulated by a Democratic candidate about one of our major candidates."

"Hamilton Roddis is a generous and a very valued citizen. The attempt to connect him with scurrilous publicity is inexcusable. His company provides jobs and a happy, prosperous life for many families in Marshfield and others all over the nation."

"If the Democrats win an election by condemning the leaders of industry with that sneer in their voices, there will be no industry in Wisconsin or in any other state. Nor will there be the jobs, and the stores, and the farmer's markets, and all the prosperity that is dependent upon it."

"Wake up, citizens! Fight prejudice and unfairness where it really is—in the Democratic Party."

Signed, "Emily M[ead]. Baldwin."

11-03-08

Age of Light

To you, I am best known as “Uncle Dave.” When I cross the Minnesota line, I become, “Dave Dylan.” That’s because, in 1997, I published a book about Hibbing, Minn., and its prodigal son Bob Dylan.

As you know, “Dylan” is neither mine nor the “real” name of the celebrated sexagenarian troubadour, Robert Allen Zimmerman. We both have a lot of fun with our new names.

Election night 2008, “Dave Dylan” journeyed to spend an evening with Bob, at Northrop Auditorium on the University of Minnesota campus, the same institution Bob had dropped out of without graduating.

Here we were in the belly of the beast: a campus in Minnesota, home of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party, of Walter Mondale, Hubert Humphrey, Paul Wellstone, Jesse Ventura, “Red” Lewis, thousands of ungovernable Finns and Communist party stalwart, Gus Hall.

But the Bob Dylan of “Gotta Serve Somebody” is no liberal. As he told Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone* magazine, “I don’t expect politicians to solve anybody’s problems.”

Wenner: “Who is going to solve them?”

Dylan: “Our own selves ... The world owes us nothing, each and every one of us, the world owes us not one single thing. Politicians or whoever.”

He seemed to have made an exception in June 2008, when Bob said, “But

we’ve got this guy out there now who is redefining the nature of politics from the ground up: Barack Obama. Am I hopeful? Yes, I’m hopeful that things might change. Some things are going to have to.”

Despite his reluctance to take sides in politics, Dylan, of Jewish heritage, has always had an affinity for the African-American people and culture, beginning in Hibbing with a black DJ in nearby Chisholm, calling himself “Jim Dandy” and, at Bob’s bourgeois home, a late night radio full of the blues. By 1960, Bob had become a critic of racial inequality, mainly through “protest” songs. His girlfriends and wives were often African-American and so is a child or two.

For his part, the President-elect has counted about 30 Dylan songs on his iPod, the favorite in the season past being “Maggie’s Farm,” an inventory of the members of Maggie’s family the singer is not going to “work for.”

Back in his “finger pointin’” days, Bob also wrote, “The Times They Are A-Changin’” and “Blowin’ in the Wind,” the latter a favorite of dilettantes, more-so than Dylanologists.

It so happened that, four years ago, also on election night, I attended Bob’s concert while the votes were being counted. In the Oshkosh state college gym, he did not mention the election or anything else and only later did I find out Pres. Bush had won reelection. By contrast, in 2008, the concert hall was flickering with a thousand online cell phones as the latest news passed swiftly

among the seemingly all-Obama audience: Pennsylvania! Ohio!

For the encore, probably having learned during the break that Obama had won, Dylan played “Like a Rolling Stone” and then turned to the expectant audience and spoke for the first time that night. Introducing his guitarist and fellow Minnesotan, he said, “Tony Garnier ... over there wearing his Obama button; Tony thinks it’s gonna be an Age of Light. Well, I was born in 1941. That was the year they bombed Pearl Harbor. Been living in darkness ever since. Looks like that’s all gonna change now.”

Then came the familiar finale, “Blowin’ in the Wind,” asking, more aptly than usual, “How many years must some people exist before they’re allowed to be free?”

As the house lights went up, the crowd “just went nuts” as it moved through a lobby where a wall-size screen projected election results. Outside, the exhilarated descendents of Scandinavian sod busters jumped around to a tribal drum beat. It felt like times a-changin’ for sure. Babes dancing in the woods and somewhere in the Minnesota night, Al Franken, waiting to find out if his ship too had come in.

11-17-08

Teens Kept Knickers Up

If you're old enough to remember goiter pills, you might agree with Mrs. Whitehouse that Sodom has come to Gomorrah and traded ballroom dancing for pole dancing.

An actress portrayed Mrs. W. recently on the British Broadcasting Co. via Wisconsin Public TV.—as an English housewife with cat glasses and hair of steel wool. According to her, the BBC of the early 1960s promoted disbelief, doubt, dirt, promiscuity, infidelity and drinking instead of faith in God. In the production, barbarians outside the courthouse chanted, “We want sex!”

As a hereditary prude, I was sympathetic with the moral crusader until she focused on a song by those beloved mop tops, the Beatles, “I Am the Walrus,” and the line, “Boy, you been a naughty girl you let your knickers down.”

Fifty years ago, Nov. 30, 1958, during Mrs. W.'s era, appeared a column in the *Daily Tribune* by regular contributor Eugene Gilbert of Gilbert Youth Research Co. Gilbert said he asked 600 boys and 600 girls:

“Should a boy try to kiss a girl on the first date? Should a girl let a boy kiss her on the first date? Do you think that the same rules about necking and petting should apply to boys and girls? Do most of the boys and girls in your school agree with your opinions about necking and petting?”

Although the answers seemed to come mainly from Brooklyn and the

Bronx (the den of iniquity), Gilbert concluded that “teeners” often set themselves stiffer standards than their elders. The interviewees seemed to agree that kissing “and even necking” were all right for those “going steady.” But most took a dim view of “petting,” even for steady sweethearts.

“Necking” was considered to be limited to caresses from the neck up although there was considerable overlapping, said Gilbert, between that term and petting. “Petting” then, we have to guess, would be caresses from the neck down, some of which was referred to as “heavy petting.”

Only 11 percent of the girls and 20 percent of the boys said petting was acceptable and only half would approve it, even for engaged couples. Almost all are against “anything more intimate” before marriage.

Boys took a more “happy-go-lucky” approach though a majority agreed with the girls that a fellow ought not try to kiss a girl on the first date.

Two-thirds of teens questioned declared the same rules about necking and petting should apply to both boys and girls; though many spoke for the double standard in which girls had the most to lose (their “reputation”). “A boy will try for as much as he thinks he can get, but it is up to the girl to stop.”

“A girl can always refuse if she's not interested,” said “Fred French” of Brooklyn, NY.

“All the boys said they would marry a girl who had kissed other boys; 98 percent would marry a girl who has

necked with other fellows and—surprisingly—80 percent would marry a girl who has petted with other boys and 54 percent would marry a girl who has gone further than petting.”

The girls were stricter, said Gilbert. All said they would marry a boy who had kissed other girls and 93 percent said they would marry “a fellow who had necked a bit.” But only 63 percent said they would marry a boy who had petted with other girls and only half said they would marry someone who had gone beyond petting.

Only 18 percent of the teens said a boy should never go any further than a good night kiss on a date. Necking on a date was okayed by 65 percent of the girls and 72 percent of the boys, although most added that the couple should “really like each other.” Approval of necking rose to 75 percent from both boys and girls for steady daters.

Alas, Mrs. Whitehouse was right. The decline of Western Civilization was in full force a few years after Gilbert's interview. Man, you should have seen them kicking Edgar Allan Poe. It began with the BBC and segued into Semo-lina Pilchard climbing up the Eiffel Tower and elementary penguin singing Hare Krishna. “I am the eggman, they are the eggmen, I am the walrus.

“Goo Goo G'joob, Goo-Goo Goo G'joob.

“Goo Goo G'joob, Goo- Goo Goo G'joob.”

12-01-08

A Ken Thing

Looking for my car in the vast parking lot outside Riverview Hospital, near the more modest building in which I was born, I caught the scent of something exotic yet familiar. Burnt flesh; and I realized it was my own.

Just the day before, my daughter had asked, “When are you going to have that Ken thing removed?”

The Ken thing, a lesion on my upper lip, fortunately disguised by facial hair and shaded by a generous nose, had been deftly seared off by a soldering iron.

Not pretty, the “Ken thing” when it was my brother Ken’s own thing, looking like an inchworm popping up on the rim of his nostril for a better look around. But it could have and should have been a lifesaver. Had he screwed up his courage to have the thing snipped, Ken might have been scarfed up by the medical system and saved from the “massive” brain bleed that killed him at age 52. That was Dec. 10, 2007.

I was in the same SWCHC Museum office, where I am writing this, when the first phone call came from St. Joseph’s Hospital, Bellingham, Wash. The last call roused me at home in bed, before midnight, Dec. 11, Bellingham time, and early Dec. 12 here. They had kept him alive long enough to make his organs available; but now, the physician said, the time had come to “harvest.”

He wanted to pull the plug. Because it was my day to play God, I said OK.

Death swooped down, and it was over and everything was sewed up neatly; but what is messy and vague and disappointing is that a year goes by and Ken is still dead. Years go by and all the dead are still dead: Mom and Dad, my sister Kathy, and all the aunts and uncles and Grandpa and Grandma. All still dead.

That’s why there is Christmas, because of the loved ones that die from the little things, the pimples and Ken things, and the big melanomas and aneurisms and myocardial infarctions. Christmas, because being “still dead” is, in the words of the eminently “fustrated” Mike McCarthy, “unacceptable.” We need to go back and look at the films.

Christmas, because the old Germans I always conjure up this time of year, many of them related to me, rise up to murmur, “Stille Nacht” at the old EUB church in the family home town. Christmas, because something has to be done about it, about Grandpa, one of the old Germans dead 40 years but not still. For me, on Christmas and every day, he rises in the still dark to milk the dozen or so cows and fill the mangers with silage, the sweet smell soon replaced by a better one: fresh-frosted rolls Grandma bakes in the wood stove, waiting for David, Kathy, Gary, Ken and the other grandchildren to arrive.

Christmas, because Mom, dead a decade, reads in her quiet way from the New Testament about what the wise men, shepherds and angels did, and sets out a plate of Christmas cookies for

Santa as we insist she do. Christmas, because Dad, dead these many years, stirs the oyster stew after the candlelight services at the Methodist church, wearing that funny apron, embellished with a picture of a doofus and something about “Honey.”

Christmas, because we sing carols to our childless neighbors on Two Mile Avenue, Bert and Norman Butz. Dead but not still, they welcome us with tears.

Christmas, because on the longest and coldest night, halfway between midnight and the allowed wake-up of 6 a.m., I summon my dead sister to creep through the still house. Moonlight beams through the picture window of the pine-scented living room; the Bible lies where Mom left it; the tree is decked in silent glory; and the plate of crumbs prove the promise of the season.

But listen up hozers, that is not the whole story of Christmas this year. After the first story, the one you just read, was finished, Dec. 11, 2008, a year after the date on my brother’s death certificate, I picked up something shiny from our own living room floor—in the house and home that Ken had done so much to help build, maintain and embellish.

It was a still-brilliant 2007 quarter dollar coin emblazoned with a leaping salmon from “the Evergreen state,” the state of Washington.

“Where did that come from?” I said.

“It’s Ken,” my wife said. “Just the kind of thing he would do.”

12-15-08

Cyber-Christmas

Hey, hot stuff! Wanna chat?
 The invitation came with an animated photo of a cute gal in bra and panties lying on a bed and typing a letter to me. Hot stuff! Trekking the World Wide Web in search of local history.

When I typed in the phrase, "Christmas 'Grand Rapids,'" the former name of our fair city, the first site to pop up was "Meet Grand Rapids Asian Singles."

Here I was on a global network negotiating a global society. But it's not just a global society out there; same, right here at home. Consider my neighbors. They are (or their antecedents were) German, Swiss, Polish, Swedish, French-Canadian, Hmong and Native-American.

A sample of what else came up:

- From the Wisconsin Rapids Area Convention & Visitors Bureau: "Experience a variety of local colors and flavors by getting out and exploring the area's parks, town squares, and welcoming atmospheres."

- Next, Babcock, "a small residential community with rural aspects," where the local Ocean Spray cranberry processing plant reminds us of Cape Cod origins and which sends our product far into the wider world.

- The next entry came from the 1913-14 Grand Rapids Directory: "Go to BAKER & SON for Christmas presents. Nothing better appreciated as a present than a fancy piece of furniture." Or a well-polished casket as the directory showed:

"Baker, (Libbie) undertaker res 538 Ninth St N."

"Baker, Geo W Sr (Lizzie) undertaker 542 Baker St"

- On eBay from "Quaintcards," Montgomery Village, Md., "Grand Rapids, Wis., downtown 1908 large photo." View of West Grand faces the bridge, showing shoppers, dogs, etc., at \$9.99 plus shipping.

- Again, eBay: 14 items for Grand Rapids offered by "uffdahh," but 13 come from Grand Rapids, Mich. One is a 1912 postcard of our Dixon hotel, showing two horses and a buggy in front of the stairwell down to the Brig .

CRASH.

The history train derailed when I accidentally closed the entire Google search engine. After that, I had to start with a new search. There were 631 results.

- Dec. 22, 2008, a very contemporary concern regarding Biron and Grand Rapids holiday recycling and garbage pickup.

- An antiquated thought from the *Wisconsin Valley Leader*, Dec. 14, 1905: "Only Eight More Shopping Days Before Christmas Hurrah – Johnson Hill Company Department Store." Or not antiquated; some propaganda never gets old.

- Grand Rapids Tribune*, Dec. 14, 1916: "Xmas" specials from the Nash grocery store until Christmas on such good ol' fashioned fare as cranberries, peanuts, oranges, raisins, nuts, candy, popcorn balls, apples, pickles, olives, candied pineapple, cherries, citron and cigars.

- The grand opening of the Grand Rapids Variety Store in the Pomainville Building, opposite the Witter Hotel on First Street.

CRASH.

Hitting a key to accomplish an unrelated task, my computer went black; so I had to begin again with my cyber-Christmas perambulations: Chihuahua pups ready for Christmas! And that is now, so check it out.

- "Internet service prices and rates quotes in Grand Rapids Commercial telecommunication on my Christmas card list." Very now.

- Then. Outagamie county "WIGen-Web," for genealogists, from the Kaukauna Times. "Misses Eva and Lottie KNICKERBOCKER returned Saturday from a week's visit at Grand Rapids, Wisconsin."

- Then. Passage from a book, "History of Michigan," about a Grand Rapids Jeweler who moved on to Menomonie, Mich. – George A. Woodford.

- Now. A resolution of the town board that they might elect to provide special pickups for Christmas trees.

- Then. "GEORGE H. ALBEE cemetery #44." Website for "Obituaries of Manitowoc county." From *Der Nord Westen*, 26 Nov. 1908: a former resident "of our city," a traveling representative for the Plumb Nelson Co., Albee died at his residence in Grand Rapids, Wis.

- Then—or now. "Russian brides want to meet Grand Rapids men."

Hey, Hot Stuff!

Hey, yourself.

12-29-08

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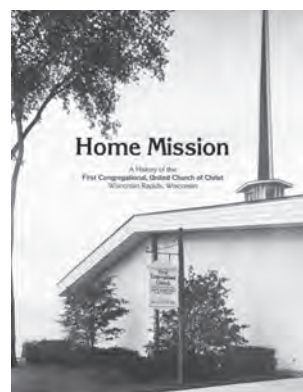
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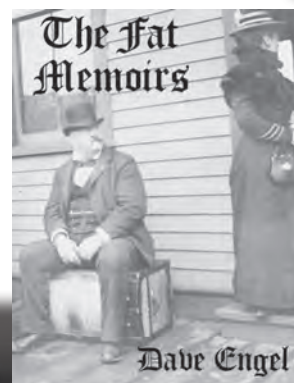
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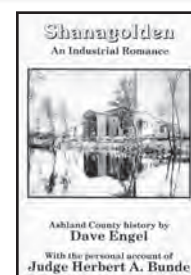
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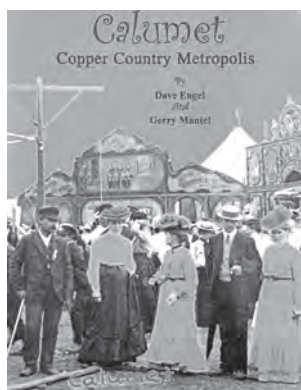
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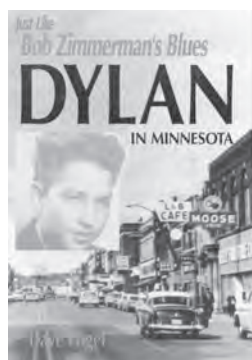
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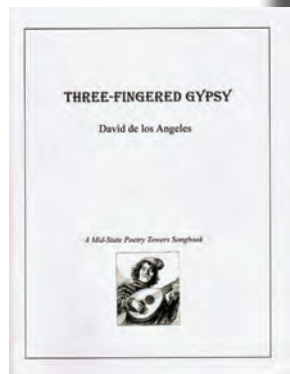
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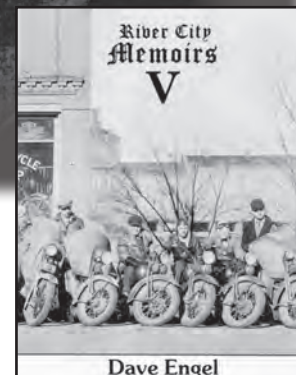
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