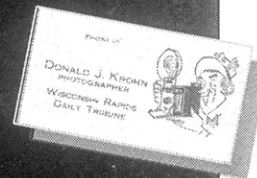




May 2004

South Wood County Historical Corp.

Artifacts



Cover photo by Don Krohn. See pages 4, 5, 10. Stories by Joan Haasl, 2-3.
Ray Sampson interview, 6-9. History from McMillan, 11.

1998 photo by D.E.



Joan Haasl

Every picture tells a story. Or it did in 1980, with Joan Staub Haasl's help, at her 1910 Gaynor Avenue home, Wisconsin Rapids, where I viewed her collection of historical postcards. No one can tell a tale with more gusto and good humor.

In a 1998 interview, she reminded me, "My name is spelled J-o-a-n but it's pronounced Jo Ann. When I went to art school in Milwaukee, the teacher could not pronounce Staub, so she called me Miss Stubbs. Old friends still write Stubb or Stubbie."

Her reminiscences and those of other local writers will be a regular feature.

Dave Engel

I Get to Cross the Street

I liked Third Street, the nearness to downtown, the sights and sounds.

I liked hearing the Wisconsin Valley milk man delivering milk with the horse drawn wagon to our house at 441 Third Street South. Early in the morning, the horse's hooves would clop along, the horse would snort and I could hear the milk bottles rattle. On freezing mornings the cream would be popped up.

In nice weather I would sit by the hydrant waiting for Dr. Lee Pomainville to go by in his little coupe. He always tooted at me and I waved, a big event in my life.

At that time I was limited to my yard. "No crossing streets," I was told.

One day I stood by the curb, telling myself, "You know you're not supposed to cross the street," and then suddenly I was on the other side.

The hired girl came and got me and said "You're in trouble now, kid."

When I got older and learned to roller skate, I could go up and down the block. Then I could go a little further and finally I could go from

the post office to the hospital on the same side of the street. Then the big day when I could cross Third all by myself.

I liked to skate by the old houses on Third and I especially liked the Witter house. I tried to picture in my mind what it was like inside.

Then it became T.B. Scott Library and I often saw the inside. With bookshelves all over and ugly floor tile, it wasn't as grand as I imagined.

Then it became the South Wood County Historical Corp. museum and I've volunteered there for more than twenty years. It just gets better all the time.

I often sit and wonder what it was like when I was a child and the Witters lived there. I think they would like what we've done with the old building.

But truthfully, I can't imagine living there. It has more the feel of an institution than it does of a home. Maybe when the Witters were there it felt like a real home. The walls won't talk, so I'll never know.

Joan Haasl

The Old House

In 1933 and early 1934, the house at 441 Third Street South was cut in two. The house originally had ten rooms and an interesting history.

The property was first deeded to Samuel Rawson Merrill by the United States in 1845. Later, it was sold to William Roe, who built the house around 1876. Roe sold the house to Mrs. Sarah E. Vaughan, the mother of Assemblyman B.M. Vaughan. She later sold it to Eugene Bisbee.

In 1902, the George W. Mead family rented the house. For an article in the *Tribune* in 1934, Mr. Mead said Bisbee wanted \$15 per month without furnace or bathroom.

Mr. Mead said he would pay \$30 per month if bath and furnace were installed. This was done for \$1,000.

The Mead family moved in, July 4, 1902. On May 25, 1905, Mr. Mead bought the house from Mr. Bisbee. On July 4, 1912, the Mead family moved to their new brick home on Belle Isle.

Lacy Horton, manager of the Grand Rapids Milling Company bought the house from Mr. Mead and Horton later sold it to A.G. Miller in 1922. On March 6, 1926, my father, Joe Staub bought the house from Miller.

Some remodeling was done shortly after this sale, and the major remodeling was started in 1933. The house was cut apart where French doors separated dining and living rooms.

The rooms in the original house were huge. Brother Bill could ride his two-wheeler through the living and dining rooms without touching any furniture.

I was five when the house was cut in two, fourteen when Pa died, and I went to live at Rowland's.

I remember a few things from the old house. The attic was large with finished steps going up, and a wood floor.

There was an old trunk that had belonged to my Grandma Staub. She died three months after I was born. The trunk was never opened, I don't know what happened to it, and I still wonder what was inside.

I remember playing with Dad's jackknife, cutting my finger and crying when I saw blood. I remember the porch across the front and around the side.

On rainy days, I put blankets around a card table and played inside in my own little world. I remember eating some cheese and getting sick in my crib (I still don't like cheese). My crib was in a big front room. My doll was in a box under the crib. I stood on the rail and jumped in the crib, and the bottom collapsed and smashed the doll.

Pa went to Ragan Furniture and got me a metal bed with a twenty year guarantee. Some of my kids slept in that bed.

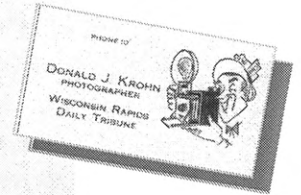
I also remember a Halloween with Mrs. Martin Jacobson in the attic playing a witch. She had a costume with a big peaked hat and a cackle that was really scary. Jack Goggins ran home crying; he was so scared.

I remember Raymond Vickers and his mother living upstairs and Raymond playing the piano. He had lived in New York City and came home to live with his mother. She saved cheese boxes for me to play with. Raymond said he would play for my wedding some day.

I remember digging a hole in the back yard. When the hired girl asked what I was doing, I said I was digging a hole to China.

I remember looking for my pet chicken Brownie and getting stung by bees.

Bill laughed and said, "We ate Brownie for Sunday dinner."



Right:
Boy Scout
troop
applying first
aid.

Location?
Could it be
the Armory?

Above:
Boys in
process of
needing first
aid.

Location?
Names?
Send to Dave
Engel, 5597
Third
Avenue,
Rudolph WI
54475. Or
kdengel
@wctc.net





Building at left background looks like Buzz's Bar. That would mean the girls were getting help with their bicycle licenses at the 1950s City Hall and police station on West Grand Avenue.



Background dugout: Witter Field? Picnic on pitcher's mound? Photo identification welcome: send to Dave Engel, 5597 Third Avenue, Rudolph 54475. Or kdengel@wctc.net

Our 20th Century

An Interview Series

Ray Sampson

Full name: Henry Ray Sampson

August 28, 1907 – January 2, 2001

Interviewed April 20, 1998, as part of a series sponsored by the South Wood County Historical Corp., Pam Walker, Director

Complete interview on file at the Museum

As told to Dave Engel

All six of us kids were born where the courthouse is. We sat between the old courthouse and the old fire station and the library down there and the jail up above. We sold that property in '36 to the county. Three houses made out of this one are on Fifth Street right now.

It was a nine-room, two-story house. No water, no toilet. Nobody that I knew of had water then. A cord for a light bulb. Three coal stoves and a kitchen cook stove.

The Market Square was in front of it. On the east bank, there was a horse barn. Twelve stalls. That market was busier than hell.

My mother's folks lived on Third Street, three blocks past the Elks Club. She fed all the farmers from Kellner and all the area. Every market day.

On the hill now, if you go down Third Street, there's a great big old yellow house. It was called the Grace House. They were in competition with my grandma.

My mother's folks were named Halverson. Henry Halverson. My grandmother's name was Mary. And my mother's name was Ida M.

They were the caretakers for the old L.M. Alexanders in Port Edwards. You know where the "Y" is? There used to be a great big white house back there. My grandfolks lived there, where my mother was born.

My father's name was Henry. There was Henry A., my granddad, Henry A. Junior, and I am Henry Ray and I got a Henry A., down in

Oshkosh, and then his son is Henry too. So there are five Henrys in a row.

The one before the Henry, his name was Ahira B. [A-hire-ah]. I don't know a thing about him. That's A.B. Sampson, my great-grandfather.

Sampson Street is named after my granddad, Henry A. He had a sawmill out that way.

Granddad

Henry A., my dad, died when he was 44. We lived with my granddad up where the courthouse was, at 8th and Oak. We took care of him. Tough old guy, I'll tell you. I never saw him without whiskers and he lived to be 93. He was big. My dad was a big man, too.

My mother and all the kids lived with him. He was a great hunter too. But all he thought about was timber.

He owned a section of land out where the Moccasin Creek is. Out toward Seneca Corners. There's still an old stone silo with an old tumble-down barn. He had a sawmill there and he had one where the nursery is. We owned all the shoreline there.

He was in business in lumber with Isaac Witter and T.B. Scott, the guy our library was named after. Then he formed the Ahdawagam [Oberbeck furniture, 1891], which later was the box plant for Consolidated.

Brewery

Then some people in town started the brewery just above the dam. There was some Lutz and some Reeves and my dad at that time was superintendent of the furniture factory.

It changed from a brewery about 1919 or 1920. Not because of Prohibition. It just couldn't make any money. And the banks weren't giving any either. My granddad financed that brewery and then they went busted.

My granddad took my dad out of the Ahdawagam to run the canning factory.

Canning Company

At that time, my dad was in business with Frank Abel in Abel & Mullen. I was going to school at Beloit College. I started my second year and had to come back and take over the canning company.

I took over in 1928 and ran it until 1969. In 1928, it was already a canning factory. Everything was taken out of there from the brewery.

We had our closing machines and our snippers, our box makers, labeling machines and our warehouses. We had 105 workers on the two shifts.

Peas are easy to can. Beans are hard to can.

We canned peas first. We didn't plant any beans until the 15th of May. Peas, we planted in April.

I was twenty then. I started with \$1800, just enough to buy the seed. Bean seed.

Had pretty good luck for all those years. We contracted with the farmers every year, supplied the seed and charged them for it.

In '45 we went into the pea business. Green and wax beans and peas. My dad tried one year on beets and carrots. Unsuitable.

We owned pea vineries at Vesper, Milladore and Rudolph. They got hard pan underneath.

So then, when the irrigation came in, we moved to the sand, around '45. You know Hatch Berard? His dad was a policeman here. Hatch moved to Stevens Point. He had the first irrigation on the sand.

Then we bought the portable viners. But we did that on the sand. Cut 'em, shelled 'em, put 'em in a container. The farmers came and

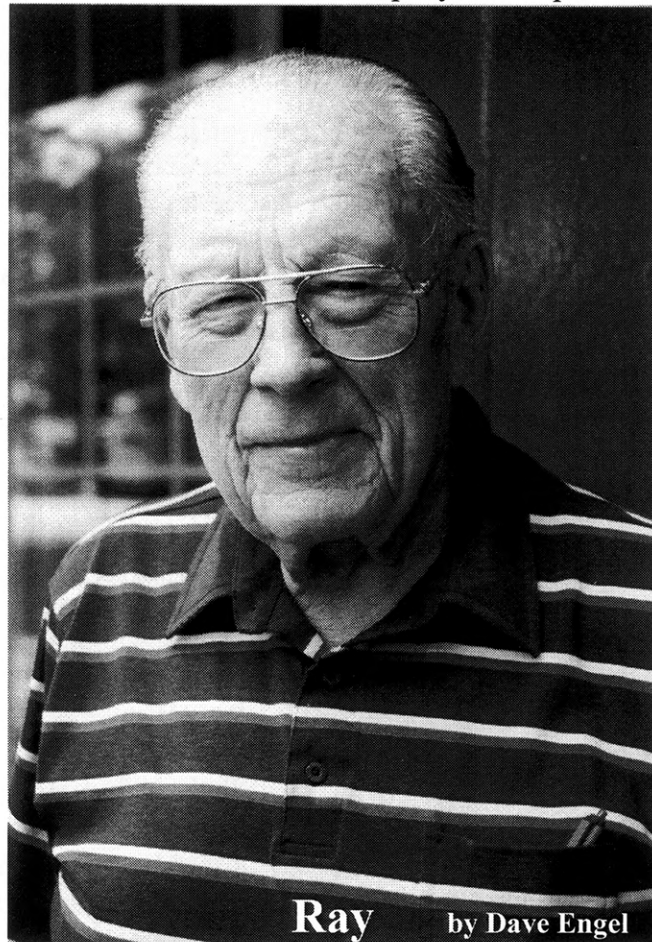
picked up the pea vines and fed them to the cattle.

Agriculture

I left the agriculture to the agriculture department of the Continental Can company and my head field man. And it wasn't too hard on the peas or beans because the Green Giant company developed what they called the heat

unit in the ground. We would take the high and the low every day, add them together, divide them. That was how much heat there was in the ground. So many heat units, they're ready.

The horticulture station of the University of Wisconsin down in Hancock got a hold of that and developed it. We probably got the greatest agricultural station in the world down at Hancock. I'd go in there every day, to Hancock. We had a lot of our beans down there.



Ray by Dave Engel

Markets

We sold the peas and beans to the wholesale grocers. At some time or other, we've sold to every wholesale grocer in the Midwest. We sold to Lakeside Canning in Manitowoc, when the irrigation came in.

They used to buy four or five different items in a car or truck. Now they want everything just one item. It better be what they want or you're gonna get it back.

We sold to the Nash-Finch Company, *Our Family* label, out of the Twin Cities. I got in pretty good with them. They're probably Number eight now. Kroger's number one. Winn-Dixie's number two, Safeway, on the coast, is number three.

But our big account was Nash Finch in Minneapolis. Then we had Western Grocer down at Marshalltown, Iowa.

Heart of Wisconsin was our good brand. *Sampson* was our cheap brand; because some of these wholesale grocers didn't have a cheap brand then. They do now. Only about 10 percent of our stuff was cheap. The rest was all fancy.

We had canners in the state that never packed a can of fancy anything in their life. We had beans, cut beans, whole beans, French style.

Peas

Let me tell you about peas. You get eighteen different grades of peas from every ton you take in.

You got fancy, that's the best. Then you got one that's an extra standard, and then you get a standard, off the same vine. Depending on how much starch was in the pea. And we did that by floating them in graders in a salt solution. Depending how close you want to make that to fancy or extra standard you'd vary the density of the brine. They'd either float or they'd go down.

One of my big experiences: we sold a truck of twelve hundred cases to A&P out in Massachusetts, cheap peas, just over ten cents a can. Full of starch.

Because we didn't have the same can mark on it as the ones they picked out when they were here, they turned them down.

Jesus, I didn't know what the hell to do. Freight was about 400 bucks on the car.

So I got a hold of a broker in Milwaukee that I knew. They would try and sell them. Otherwise, you take it back, you gotta take the label off, put a new case on, re-label them; it cost a fortune.

About three days later, he called me. "Got your peas sold, Ray. To Campbell Soup." God I was happy.

Beans

We sold some whole yellow wax beans to Libby, McNeill & Libby. They sent them to their one arsenal building down in Hammond, Indiana.

The broker called me, "Ray, the Libby buyer isn't satisfied. Come on down."

So I went down and met with him. A couple of them had a little rust spot. I guess I settled for about \$400 less or something. A few weeks later, I was down in Des Moines at the Nash Finch warehouse.

Here's the same goddam beans, the same ones we shipped them, that we made a settlement on. They put 'em in a new case with a new label on.

Bad years? The Depression was rough! You could buy peas for ten cents a can. And the can cost about three cents.

World War II was good for us. We used to sell Uncle Sam thirty, forty thousand cases a year.

The drought never hurt us but the rain hurt us one year when we couldn't plant the peas. It was in the forties some time.

Pickers

Otherwise, we always had a good crop. And we always had to rely on the Polish people. If it wasn't for the Polish, we couldn't run. They all had a big family so they could pick them.

You know where Hatley and Bevent are? Polonia? Stevens Point? We had receiving stations there. Two of them were grocery stores, About five of them were tavern keepers. They did real well, especially the boys up at Hatley and Bevent.

We paid cash for the beans on delivery. We'd pay them once a week. Oh God, they made a fortune.

Had a lot of good friends up there. Kubisiak. Koch. Barney Gavin at Polonia. The young

Gavin that worked at the First National Bank. He got hurt at a baseball game over at Polonia. He was a comptroller at the First National Bank here. Wife lives right over here.

I think we had around eleven hundred picking, around eleven hundred farmers working for us. That's a lot of 'em.

We never had a labor shortage. Eighty percent of our workers were women. We had kids that were sixteen years or older. We had about twenty kids and eighty-five women.

Remember Dr. Pomainville? He examined them all for us. He was a good friend of mine.

Huffman

One year, we had the German prisoners here, remember that? Huffman tried to get in on the deal. We paid them more than he did. He sent Carl Otto up to talk to me and he sent Frechette up to talk to me. Remember George Frechette? He was a good friend of mine too. And Hank Fey maybe. Before he had that little photography shop in the Mead-Witter Block.

Remember Lloyd Chambers, the attorney? I had to get him to simmer it down a little bit. Huffman never liked me after that.

Bill Huffman [Daily Tribune publisher]: I belonged to the Upriver Gun Club when the old man was there. He had diabetes. We all watched him take a shot in the arm. He didn't like that. He was crabby, tighter than hell, bossy.

When I was in the canning business, I had a field man by the name of Livernash, out of Rudolph. A good farmer and a good agriculture man. He went to work for Bill. Couldn't stand it for over three days. But Bill was all right. I knew him quite well.

Payback

Every now and then, I'm out at the Vintage or the Hardwood Grill or something, somebody will come up to me, "Remember me, Ray? You

helped me get through school. I just graduated from La Crosse. I came here to thank you."

So I get a kick out of it. I don't know who the hell they are.

Out of Business

Then the automated picker came in. That was, I think, in '74 or '75. It put the big boys, the Del Montes, the Libby's, Green Giant, in the bean business. If you had to pick them by hand, they wouldn't fool with them.

And that put us out of business. I went out in '69. Not only did the big boys hurt us but the DNR didn't help us any.

Remember that article in the *Tribune*? "We caught some walleyed pike below the Nekoosa dam and they tasted like Sampson peas." Somebody still jabs me every time about that.

In the spring of '69, the devils used to sit in an old tin boat outside of my building there.

One Sunday morning, the Consolidated pulled down the river to clean up the bank between the Green Bay bridge and the gate.

About nine o'clock, here comes the game warden. What was his name? It begins with an S. [Vince Skilling?]

My son was with me then. He was a senior at Stevens Point.

The warden said, "Ray, if I had my way, I'd shut this place down right now!"

My son said, "You would, like hell," and was going to go after him but he walked away.

They sent a bunch of plans from Madison. What we had to do for sewage disposal.

I sent it to the Continental Can Company in Chicago and some engineering firm over in Green Bay. They came up with a figure of \$690,000 for disposal.

My people wouldn't go for it. It's a good thing. We stayed durn near too long. That was the end of the whole damn thing.



Photo by former *Tribune* photographer Don Krohn, shows what appears to be a Sampson Canning Co. worker removing a batch of peas or beans from a cooker.

One of many teenage boys who benefited from summer employment at Sampson's, *Artifacts* editor Dave Engel relates a painful encounter with the machinery pictured in the May 17 *Tribune*.

Photos by Don Krohn

After several years working in the mail room while also developing film, Don Krohn paid some dues pursuing weekend photography before being hired by publisher Bill Huffman as a full-fledged *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune* photographer. His work spans the years 1947-1953 and portrays a community that makes a little news and does a lot of living.

In 1953, Port Edwards resident Krohn began work at Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. as assistant editor/photographer for the company's magazine, *Nepco News*. He moved up through the ranks to become public relations manager in 1971.

The cover photo of the May 2004 *Artifacts*, titled "Moving In," was named "Fire Foto of the Year," in May, 1951.

For more on Krohn, see *River City Memoirs*, *Daily Tribune*, April 14, 2001. His photos will be a continuing feature in *Artifacts*.



History at McMillan

by Don Litzer

Head of Adult Services
McMillan Memorial Library

McMillan Memorial Library, in fulfilling its role as a center of community information and discourse, firmly believes that it should be a center of collective memory for the communities it serves.

This philosophy has been actualized at the Library by the collection of materials and the development of services that enable its patrons to develop an awareness and appreciation of history at a personal level (genealogical research), and/or more generally, south Wood County's history on its own and in a larger context.

While the Library can do much on its own, it can achieve even greater success by developing partnerships with others in the community sharing its interests and goals.

For example, the Library has had a close working relationship with the Heart O'Wisconsin Genealogical Society (HOWGS) since HOWGS was organized over twenty-five years ago. HOWGS holds its meetings at the Library. Its donations of funds and materials have helped the Library become a premier destination for genealogical research in south Wood County. The Library and HOWGS have at times inspired each other to explore new initiatives to improve collections, services, and research access for genealogists and other historians.

It would be a mistake to take such positive relationships for granted.

Several years ago at a meeting sponsored by the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society to orient new chapter officers, I attended a session about library-society cooperation, after which I

was grateful to be at McMillan Memorial Library.

Most of the people in that session commented about libraries and societies not getting along. Societies were often proprietary about their "stuff," while many libraries were not particularly interested in the research needs of genealogists or historians.

This example and other research I've done bears out that cooperation between libraries, genealogical societies and historical societies, while frequent, is not universal. In too many places, for a variety of reasons, historical organizations and libraries have gone their own way, instead of sharing and seeking synergy, often in the process confusing the public and discouraging their interest.

McMillan Memorial Library's relationship with the South Wood County Historical Corporation (SWCHC) and Museum has been amicable and constructive. By and large our operations are complementary and sometimes intersect. While SWCHC has focused on exhibits, artifacts and archival resources, the Library has concentrated on published works, including special collections of rare and fragile items, and indices to a variety of historical materials and resources.

In recent years, McMillan Memorial Library and SWCHC have regularly collaborated to make history more accessible and available, not only locally but worldwide via the Internet, through the following projects that will be more fully described in future editions of this column:

- South Wood County newspapers
- City directories of south Wood County communities
- Wood County plat books

McMillan Memorial Library welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of south Wood County's heritage by being a part of SWCHC's *Artifacts*, and wishes it a long, entertaining and educational run.

Artifacts

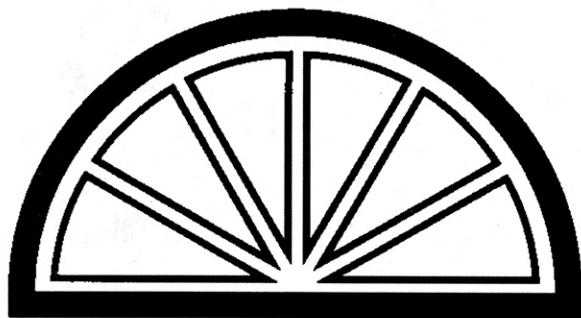
is a quarterly publication of
The South Wood County Historical Corp.
715-423-1580
Editor Dave Engel
kdengel@wctc.net

Thanks, Pam

In order to devote full-time to a teaching career, Pamela Walker has resigned as SWCHC Director.

During Pam's tenure, SWCHC achieved a high level of professionalism and achievement. Among her notable accomplishments are the cranberry history and Grim Natwick-Betty Boop exhibits.

The new *Artifacts* editor is grateful to Pam for support of several projects that kept him in the history game, including a substantial interview series responsible for the Ray Sampson story on pages 6-9.



**South Wood County Historical Corp.
540 Third Street South
Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494**

To:

Museum Summer Season

Open: Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays,
beginning May 30, 2004

Hours: 1-4 p.m.

Last Day: Sunday, Sept. 5

Administrator: Karen Pecher

Karen joined SWCHC in 1991 as a volunteer and has been a staff member since 1992. She oversees building, exhibits and collections and represents the Museum to the public.

New: Logging Exhibit in basement. "Thank you" to Mead-Witter Foundation, Nieman Photography, Art Adams and Gordon Konietzki.

Garden Walk: Saturday, July 10. The Museum joins for the second time.

Summer Staff: Amy Konietzki, Molly Adams, Megan Lobner.

Membership: \$15 annual.

Call, mail or email South Wood County Historical Corp., 540 Third Street South, Wisconsin Rapids 54494. 423-1580.
museum@wctc.net

To preserve our history and subscribe to
Artifacts—

join SWCHC today!