

June 2017

Volume II #50

ARTIFACTS



Cover: from *Phil's Den of Antiquity*. Antiquary's Corner, p. 2; #50 by Phil Brown, 3-4; Talking Walls by Lori Brost, 5-7; Polish Church by Alison Bruener, 8-15; West Side Market Square, cars by Bill Hartley, 16-17; Biron Park Store by Tom Martens, 18-20; Pfiffner murals by Kathy Engel, 21; Yard Art by Barry Jens, 22-23; Point Basse by UD, 24-25; Reinhold Brehm by Scott Brehm, 26-29; More Hang Outs by Ed Severson, 30-31; Fischer's Dairy photo, 32.



The Antiquary's Corner

Quality row

This column is mainly interested in people and events that have figured in the history of this locality in the past and with associations in connection with spots and places of local interest.

There is much of the local history that we know something about but there is a lot of valuable material that is known to many that would make interesting reading and also be useful in the local history.

If you know any story or know the origin of any name applying to the various subjects below mentioned, will you please write to this column, telling in your own way anything bearing on the subject:

Punkin hill; Quality row; Cranberry street or Seneca road; Stonequarry hill;

The eddy; Long island; Hunter's island; Cook's island; Sengerfest island;

Sherman rock; Meehan's mill; Buckskin shoot; Lost channel. First courthouse, when built, when burned and where located?

What stage lines do you know about, who drove the stages? What were the half way houses called and who was the proprietor?

Crooked rift. Love's creek.

Who were some of the pilots and who ran the rafts and logs?

Any reminiscences about Old Central house, the Witter House, Noissa house (incorrectly spelled), Magnolia house, Music hall, Rablin house.

Who started the Society of St. John the Baptist, and anything you recall regarding it?

Railroad creek, what do you know about it and what part has it played in the local history?

What do you know about--

Clark & Scott's mill, Hansen's mill, Worden's stone quarry, Bensley's mill, Mack & Spencer's mill?

Tibbit's planing mill, Biron mill, Neeves' saw mill?

If you know all the answers above, you're probably dead. The passage vaguely smells of our own "River City Memoirs"—but long before Uncle Dave was hatched, it was written by his predecessor, A.T. "Tom" Taylor.

Taylor, an insurance agent, was the reigning "antiquary" in the 1930s, publishing in the *Daily Tribune* and compiling a collection of Wisconsin Rapids history. The column at left had been pasted over a catalogue page in a scrapbook by Mrs. Ivah Babcock, Wisconsin Rapids.

Mrs. Ivah Babcock?

A question for the current scholar, who found Babcock's scrapbook at the Museum in 1980. Born Ivah Compton into a prominent local family, she married John Rablin Jr., of a similar background. John Jr. died in 1884. Ivah married Charles Francis Babcock, a few months before his death Aug. 11, 1892.

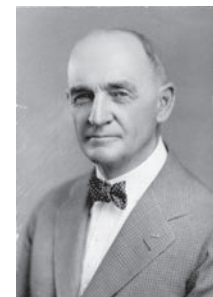
Twice-widowed Ivah found employment as a "matron" at Indian schools in Utah, Hayward, Wis., Arizona and Oklahoma territory. In 1914, she loaned a collection of pottery, baskets and blankets made by the "Indians of the Southwest" to the local T.B. Scott library. In 1918, she made ambulance pillows for use in WWI and in 1920, she presented a paper on the DAR movement.

While in Rapids, Ivah lived with her sister, Ella Schultz, a teacher.

When Ivah died at King Veterans home, Wau-paca, at age 75, she was called "almost a life-long resident of Wisconsin Rapids." Among her cousins were George and F.J. Wood, sons of the county's namesake.

Upon her death she left her scrapbook to the local DAR chapter, then housed in the LeFebvre building on the west river bank. It was chock full of cherished relics, including Ivah's, many of which found their way to the Museum.

Photo of himself from book local historian Tom Taylor compiled for the city of Wisconsin Rapids in 1934-39



Punkin hill



gritzz the Wite Gul

BUCKSKIN SHOOT

Ivah Babcock

LeFebvre Building

St. John the Baptist Society

Oldest young man now youngest old man

A toast to our “avuncular” editor

By Phil Brown
SWCHC President

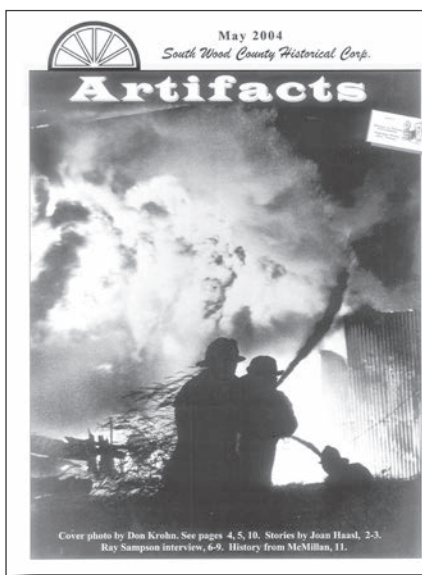


When our own Uncle Dave published *The Perils of Country Living*, a book of poetry, in 1975, the *Daily Tribune* quoted him saying he was the, “area’s oldest young man.” A lot of years have gone by and now Dave Engel tells me he is the “area’s youngest old man.”

The *Artifacts* you are holding is the 50th issue in “Volume II,” expanding the previous newsletter format since 2004 as a unique local history magazine providing a wealth of information. In it, every word, picture and pixel is chosen, written, edited, designed and proofread by Dave.

His local roots run deep. David Donald Engel was born at Riverview Hospital Aug. 12, 1945, and grew up on Two Mile Avenue. His parents were well known in the community through Consolidated Papers Inc., city government, neighborhood schools, Boy Scouts, the Methodist church and the Odd Fellows. The IOOF Engel Fellowship Hall honors Dave’s parents, Sally and Don.

A proud member of the LHS class of 1963, Dave graduated from WSU-Stevens Point in 1967 with majors in American Civilization and English and a minor in History—obtained while working summers in the Rapids mill. He



The first issue

At the age of 23, Dave began his first career, as an English teacher at Western Illinois University, Macomb, then returned to UW-Stevens Point, where he taught English and creative writing for a decade, hosting well-known authors such as Donald Hall, Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg along the way.

A 1978 grant allowed him to work on *Muck: A Transcendental History*, the study of his property in the town of Rudolph that began his second career—as an historical journalist. The *River City Memoirs* series was published in the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune* from 1980 until 2015.

Along the way, Uncle Dave has put together these articles in a series of at least 11 volumes,

not to mention books about Bob Dylan, the Copper Country of Upper Michigan and the logging era in northwoods Wisconsin. He is the first and only Wisconsin Rapids City Historian, founder of Wakely Inn Preservation, president of the SWCHC board, first director of SWCHC and SWCHC Archivist, currently with the able assistance of his librarian wife, Kathy.

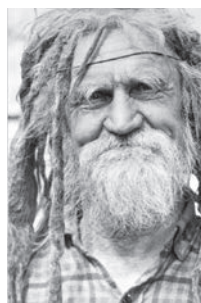
Very few people can say they left a lasting legacy to their hometown. Dave’s 40 years of local history will be accessed for generations.

Paul Gross, who documented the south Wood County area in 33 videos once said, “The history well never runs dry.”

Uncle Dave changed this to, “Dry history never runs well.”

Yes, our community should be forever grateful to Dave for writing his dry humor and always writing it well.

Thanks, Uncle Dave.

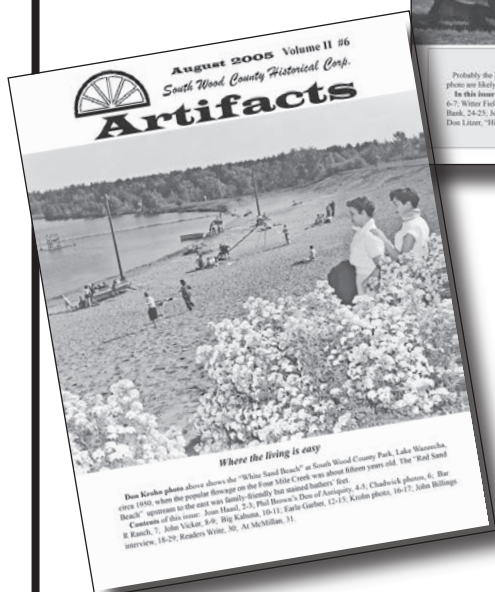
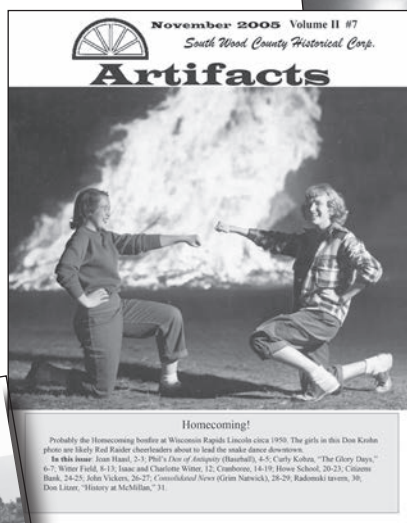
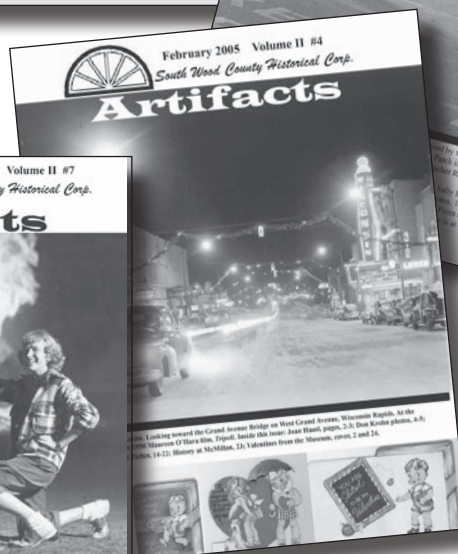
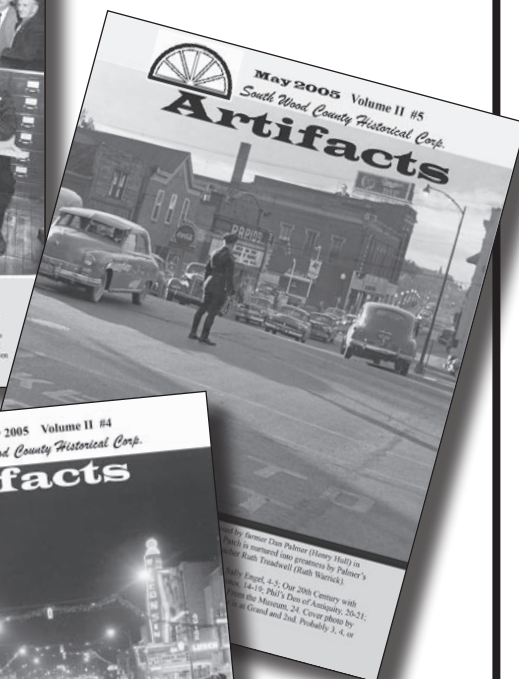
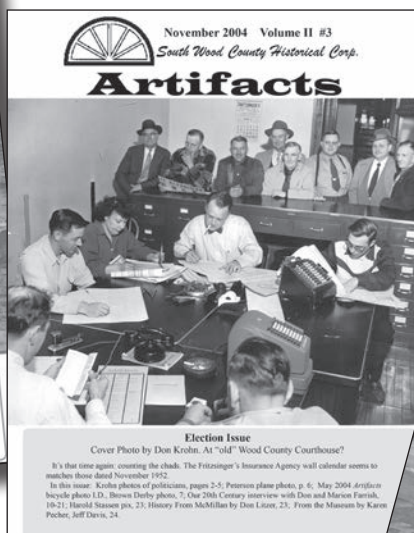
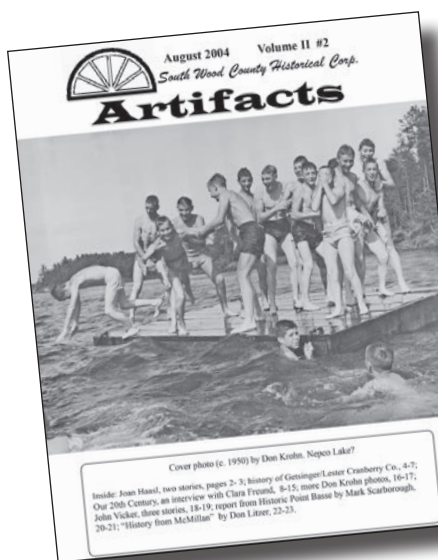


Where’s Reuben? This photo, sometimes labeled “Uncle Dave” has appeared in most of the 50 issues of *Artifacts*, but is usually hard to find.

attended the University of Wyoming on a Coe Fellowship, receiving an American Studies M.A. in 1968—later adding graduate credits from the University of Arizona.

The First Seven

(counting #1 on the previous page)



With us from the beginning, (Uncle) Warren Miller, of the Print Shop, Wisconsin Rapids, who believes, as we do, that ink on paper makes for the best *Memoirs* and who, with his capable staff, has responded to every need with his best effort and the highest quality possible.

• *Artifacts*, Vol. I, the newsletter of the South Wood County Historical Corp.

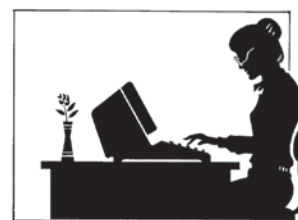
• *Artifacts*, Vol. II, the beginnings of this publication, expanded in 2004 to a local history magazine format. Early editions featured the *Daily Tribune* photos of Don Krohn.

• 50 issues later, all *Artifacts*, Vol. II, have been converted to digital files to be available on DVD and hopefully, on the also-evolving SWCHC website. Most old issues are available for purchase in print form.

Lori Brost

Museum Administrator

Our walls are talking, again



1980s art from the Daily Tribune

You've heard the saying, "If these walls could talk." In some cases they do, and sometimes the stories they tell are pretty interesting.

During a current renovation project on the Museum's third floor, crew leader Marcus Rude from Fencil Urethane Systems brought a little more of our past to light. This time, it was a personal tie to the lady of the house, Charlotte Livingston Gibson Witter.

In this discovery were two photographs. One was a scenic view that could possibly be of the bridge to Belle Isle, the other of an older man. Considering that the latter was found with the book, "Anthon's Latin Grammar – Part I" with "Geo. Gibson" enscribed inside the front cover, we believe the man is George Gibson, the father of our Charlotte.

Gibson, an Episcopal clergyman, tended missions throughout the upper Midwest and had in his later years been connected with St. John the Evangelist parish here.

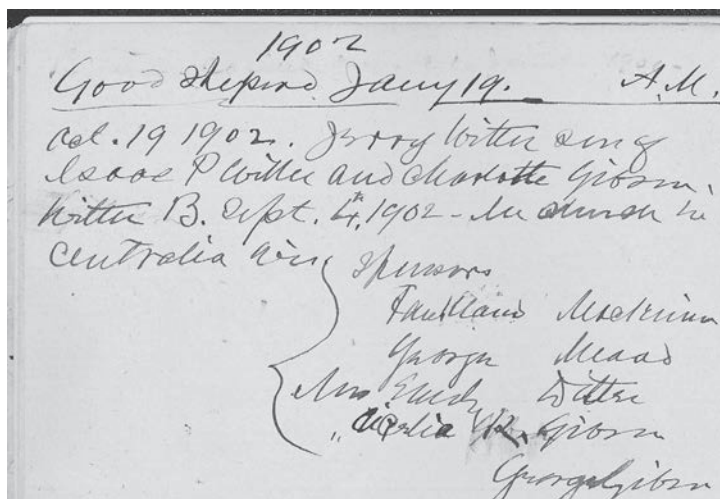
The third item tied to Charlotte is a handwritten notebook that also came from the reverend. The dates in the book cover 1891-98 and outline weekly events, most likely church services and collection amounts, within Minnesota cities such as St. Paul, Minneapolis and Shakopee.

In 1899, references to Centralia, former name of the West Side here, and Stevens Point, Wis., first appear. This may be when Gibson, at 70, had reduced his obligations because there are fewer entries on a regular basis.

On Oct. 19, 1902, 15 days after his birth, Jeremiah (Jere) Delos Witter was baptized. This would have been a special service since this would have been Charlotte and Isaacs's only son. The sponsors listed included George Mead, Cecilia Gibson and "Emilie" Witter.

The final piece of this find is a glimpse into the mind and heart of Charlotte through a letter to her fiancée, Isaac P. Witter, dated May 1900, just over a month shy of the June 27 wedding date set by the couple. The letter talks of Charlotte's struggle to achieve a sense of serenity within life's daily stresses, then dives into wedding plans. After the choir enters, the bridal party marches in to take their place at the foot of the chancel. The bride and groom approach the altar and take their vows and the choir continues to sing. Everything must go smoothly on this memorable occasion.

The letter discusses wedding trip plans. Charlotte will enjoy any plans the groom makes but she would like to give "Ruth" time to return from the wedding and settle in before they visit her. She signs off with "I think much of thee and do thou of me."



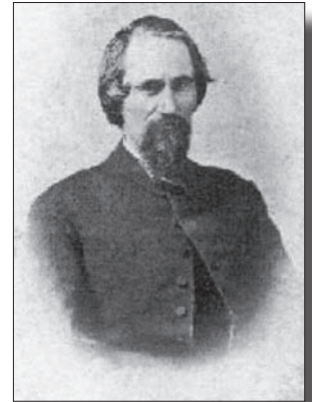
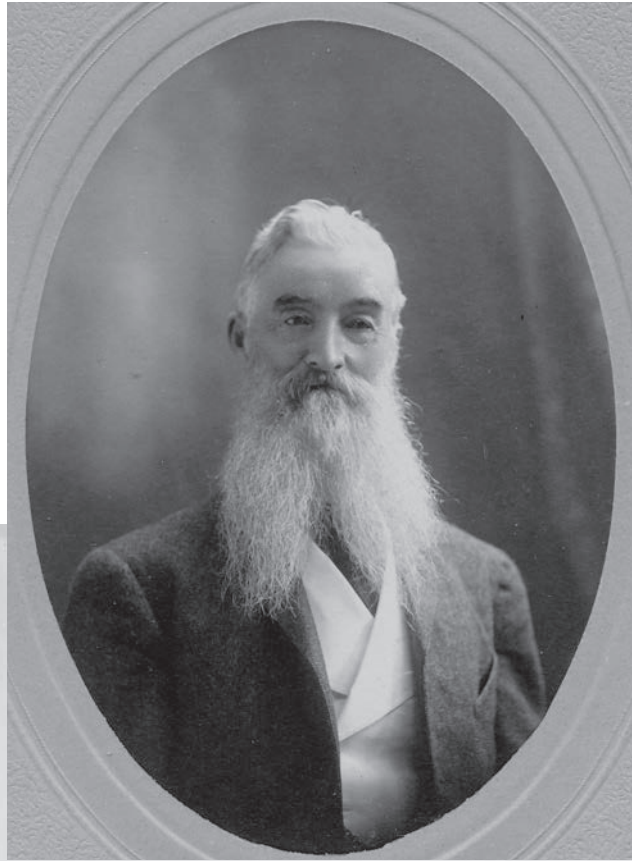
Rev. George Gibson's notes about baptism of the son of Isaac and Charlotte, "Jerry" Witter

Here's hoping more of the sentiments that meant enough to be passed down surface from time to time. Keep the stories coming, Charlotte, I'm sure you have a lot to share.

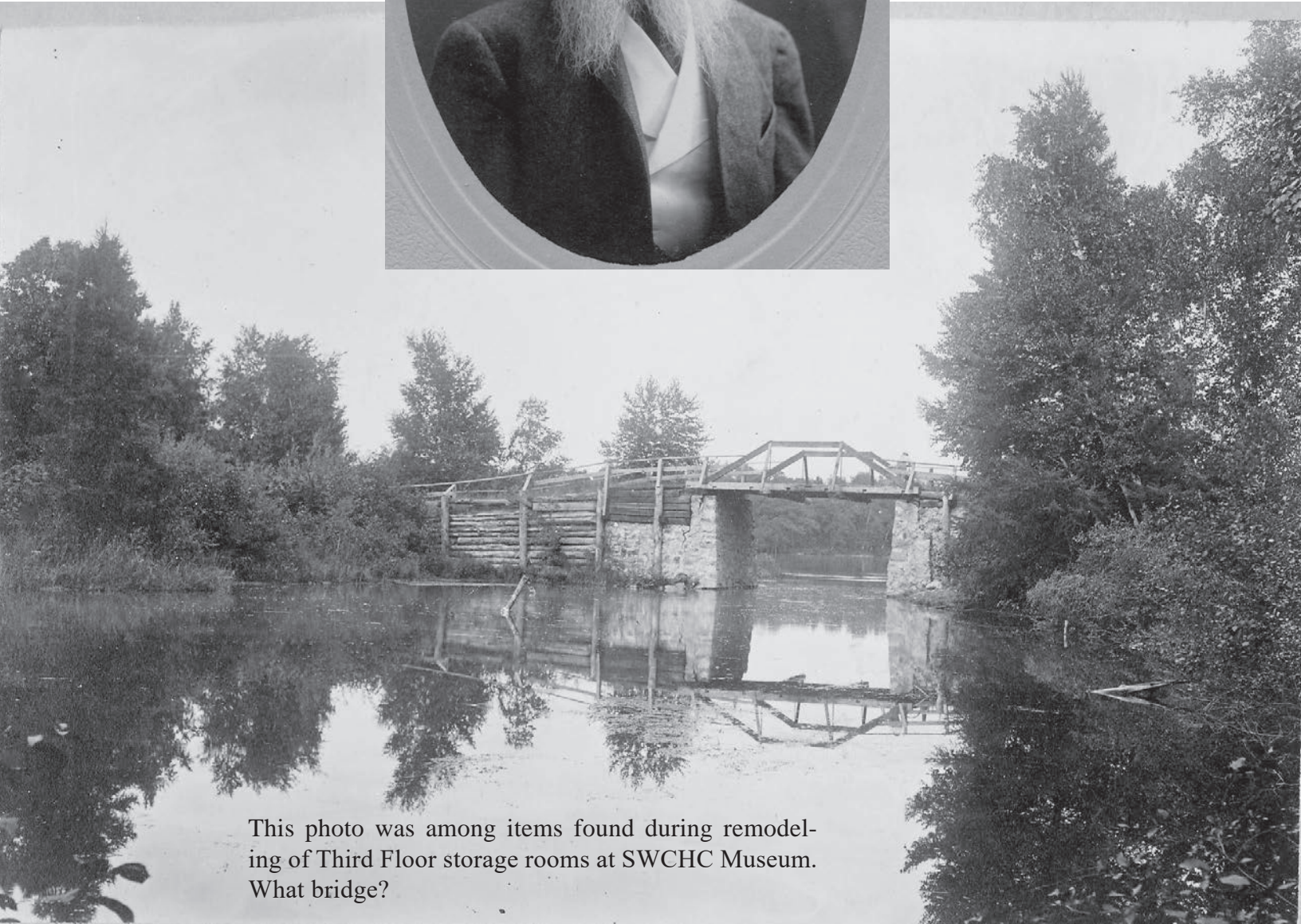
Episcopalians in the Attic



Photo of unidentified clergyman, probably Episcopalian, previously found by electrician Joe Ashbeck and Uncle Dave in the attic of the Museum

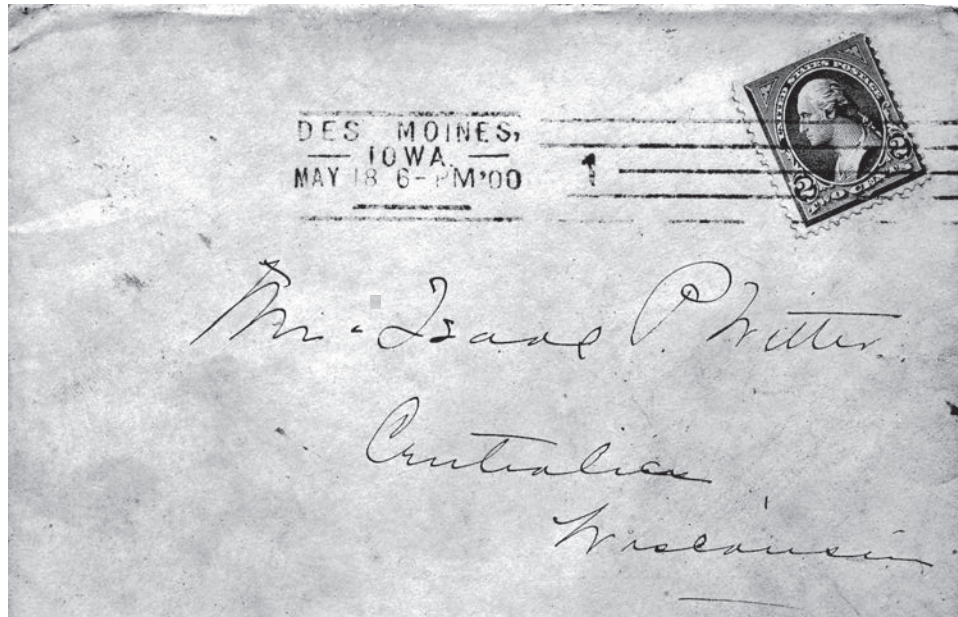


Known to be Charlotte Witter's father, George Gibson, above; photo found in wall, left



This photo was among items found during remodeling of Third Floor storage rooms at SWCHC Museum. What bridge?

From Charlotte Gibson to Isaac Witter, May 18, 1900



My Dearest Boy

This has been a bad day for me.

You did not get your letter and felt badly and therefore I have been unhappy all day. Then too it has rained every day this week and that wears on me. How blissful it must be to have a disposition that is not affected by external circumstances.

I do so long for a serene and quiet spirit that will take all the ups and downs of life with a calm smile, one that can never be bruised or battered by contact with unpleasant people or things. Oh well! That is something to strive for and that to me is the ideal of life. Heaven knows how far from it I am, but as you often say one may succeed in any thing if he but try and try I shall all my life to cultivate that inward and outer serenity.

Well dear, the dinner party is over and as I told you yesterday I broke the news to Dr. Cathell [prob. Jonathon Everist Cathell, Des Moines, Iowa, 1849-1913] about the choir. He was so perfectly delighted that he warmed up and told us funny stories one after the other until ten o'clock and then was up here the first thing this morning to talk over arrangements with me. He said we would have to have a rehearsal with the choir the night before at any time we choose.

I am a little put out because I thought to have all the out of town guests up here for a little while but perhaps we can arrange that later. The choir marches

in preceding the bridal party and then the bridal party comes in and stops at the foot of the chauncel where the betrothal service takes place. After that the clergy and party go up to the altar for the vows and the rest of the service, the choir in the mean time singing something and then we all go out to Mendelsohn or some other wedding music. Dr. Cathell said this morning "I want that all to go just like clock work. I want the whole thing to be most dignified and impressive so that it will be remembered." And I am sure it will be.

You ask me dearest about a wedding trip. Now I want you to know that any thing you arrange will be charming to me. I think the lake trip would be lovely or whatever you would like to do. I have perhaps one suggestion to offer and that is that we visit Ruth [Witter Mead, Isaac's sister?] last, for you know she will be at the wedding and we must give her a chance to get home and settled before receiving us. Do not you think that a better plan?

I received Louise's letter this morning and will reply very soon. I do not at all see why we may not be good friends for that is my most ardent wish. And now dear good by. "I think much of thee and do thou of me."

*Sincerely,
Charlotte*

By Alison Bruener, Museum Assistant
With Dave Engel, Artifacts Editor

In August 1899, plans began for a parish of their own. By December of that same year, a total of \$925 was collected from 33 families for the purchase of land.

[illegible]

Eight lots were purchased from Jere D. Witter, father of the Museum's Isaac, in 1900 for \$800. Articles of Incorporation were issued and the new parish got its first priest, Rev. Joseph J. Miller.

The heads of the 33 families who contributed to purchase the first lots would become the charter members of the new parish and were listed in a commemorative publication:

Frank Kobza Sr., Anthony Stasiak, Michael Stalowy, Casper Kubisiak, John Kollenda;

Lawrence Niewiandomski, Stephan Pivinski, Joseph Mania, Joseph Kwasigroch, Joseph Kulinski;

Anthony Golla, Lawrence Mroz, Stanley Kubisiak, Joseph Lukaszewski, Casper Wichlacz;

John Pawlowski, Anton Harczyński, Albert Kubisiak, Matthew Harczyński, Ignac Minta Sr., John Golla;

Lawrence Klepin, John Wierzbicki, John Olszewski, John Tomczyk, Casimir Niedzwiecki;

John Szejnak (Schanock), John Kubisiak, John Mroz, Joseph Galganski, Michael Pawlowski, Martin Rucinski, John Parzys.

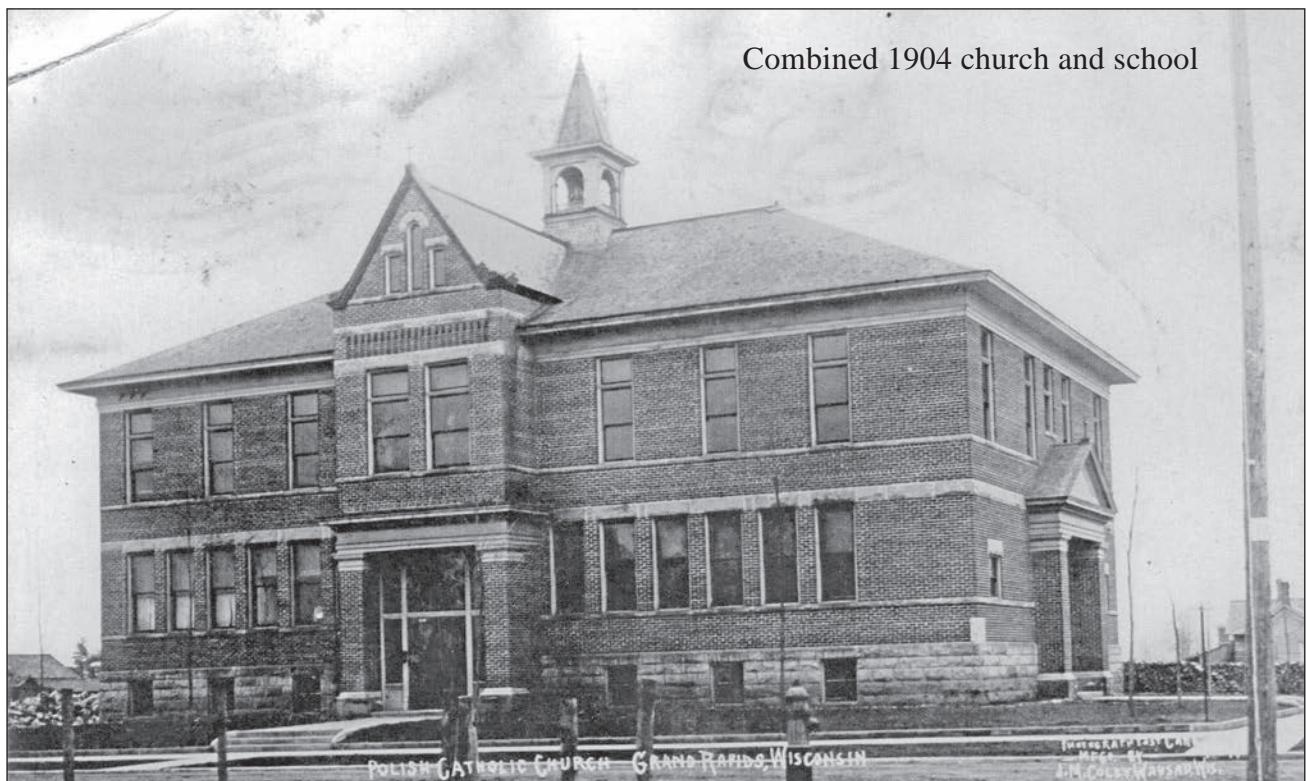
In September 1900, Father Miller was transferred to another post in the diocese. The church didn't need to look far for help, finding it at

St. Michael's church in Junction City and Poland-born Rev. James W. Gara.

Father Gara had already been tasked with building of a rectory in Junction City. The new church in Grand Rapids was to be postponed, and the locals again were invited to join SS. Peter and Paul parish. But Father Gara did not forget the pleas from the West Side and enlisted help from Father Stanislaus Elbert of St. Bronislava Church, Plover, Wis.

In 1903, the Polish church was appointed a new Reverend in James Korczyk who set to work immediately to see a structure was built. Consequently, members named the parish Saint Lawrence after the patron saint of its oldest parishioner, Lawrence Kleppin. The first priest was Rev. Korczyk, followed by Theophilus Wojak, F.C. Ciszewski and S.P. Mieczkowski, who was in office when a church history was published in the *Daily Tribune* in 1937.

Among the names of church officers were Sucinski, Warzynski, Lukaszewski, Andrejewski, Klappa, Pawleski, Bojarski, Tomczyk, Malicki, Rucinski, Malolepsy, Suchowski, Morzynski, Pawloski and Bojarski. By then, most of the service was in English rather than Polish.



Of the building, Rev. Marmurowicz later wrote, “In September, 1904, the children of St. Lawrence Parish had a school of their own, staffed by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi from Milwaukee... enrollment was in the neighborhood of 100 pupils.”

In 1901, the Polish order of Sisters had been created and separated from the School Sisters of St. Francis of Milwaukee. *Polish Catholic Churches in Wisconsin in 1905* by Roger F. Krentz, condensed from Rev. Kruschka’s multi-volume history, records that, “Mother Alfons and Mother Alexia of the School Sisters of St. Francis did not believe the Polish girls admitted to their convent to be equally intelligent and capable to teach as the local German girls. This was generally based on the fact the Polish girls came from farm families and were less educated than the metropolitan Milwaukee German girls.”

On the other hand, the Polish Sisters could speak the language.

In 1910, teaching at St. Lawrence was taken over by the Congregation of Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi—the Felician Sisters, founded in Warsaw, Poland, in 1855, by Sophia Truszkowska, and named for a shrine of St. Felix, a 16th-century Capuchin saint.

On the morning of May 18, 1914, the *Grand Rapids Daily Tribune* reported, “Fire was discovered in the Polish Catholic church about noon on Monday and notwithstanding the efforts of both fire companies the building was practically consumed...”

By the end of the day, all that remained of this first church were some of the outer brick walls. A week later, it was decided that first, the school should be rebuilt where the church was, and the future church should be built across the street on the corner of Tenth Avenue and Fremont Street. While waiting for the funds for the separate church, the school building would provide space for the church.

The school building was probably in operation by October 1915 as there is a record of a marriage

taking place on October 6, in the “St. Lawrence Church.” By 1924, the parish was free from debts and thinking about erecting a new edifice.

On Memorial Day, 1929, St. Lawrence’s Father Ciszewski fell ill and had to be rushed to the hospital for abdominal pain. The cause was found to be a ruptured appendix for which nothing could be done. The following excerpt is from the *Daily Tribune*, concerning the man who served the community for 16 years.

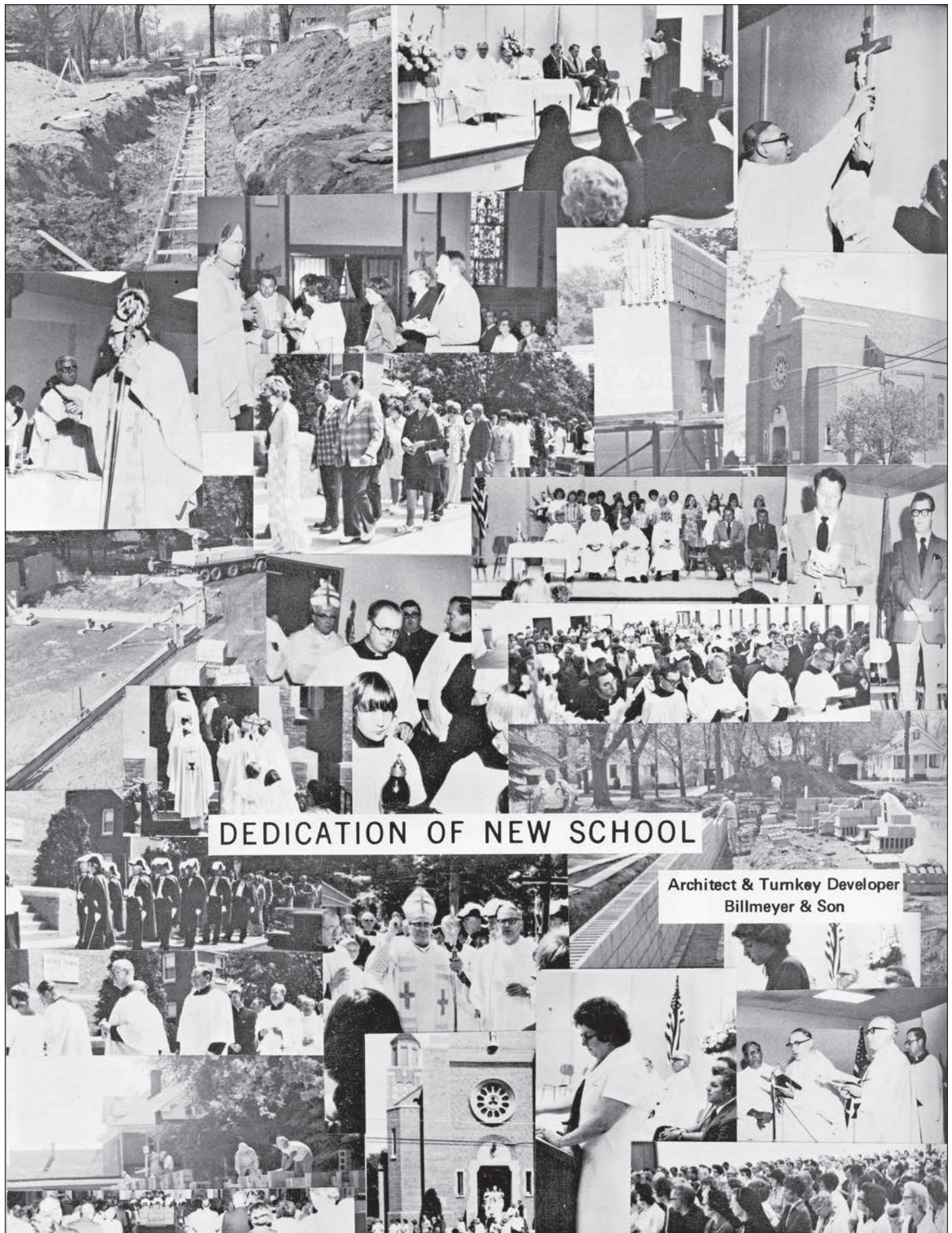
“His preaching, both in English and in the tongue of his nativity was eloquent and compelling, and his ministry was of so gentle and persuasive a nature that instinctively his parishioners looked to him for guidance, not only because he was their priest and their official shepherd, but because of the nature of the man himself.”

The latter part of June brought a familiar name home to some as Stephen P. Mieczkowski was appointed the new pastor. After years of saving and planning, the cornerstone of the church we know today bears the date 1931 and was described in 1932 by the *Daily Tribune*.

“This new structure, 116 feet long and 67 feet wide at the sacristy transepts of massive and fireproof construction, is truly impressive and in harmony with the other new institutions of this beautiful city. The high walls of vari-colored fire clay brick, trimmed with Bedford stone and artistic from every standpoint, form an enchanting background to the most exacting critic. The beauty of the building is enhanced by the Ludovici Celadon red and fire flash tile roof.”

“The stately Basillica-Romanesque tower 90 feet in height serves as campanile for the two large bells donated by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Romanski Sr. and their children...”

“The building is equipped with vapor heat. No interior furniture has been purchased, except the Rose window of beautiful art glass representing the gift of the Polish National Alliance.”



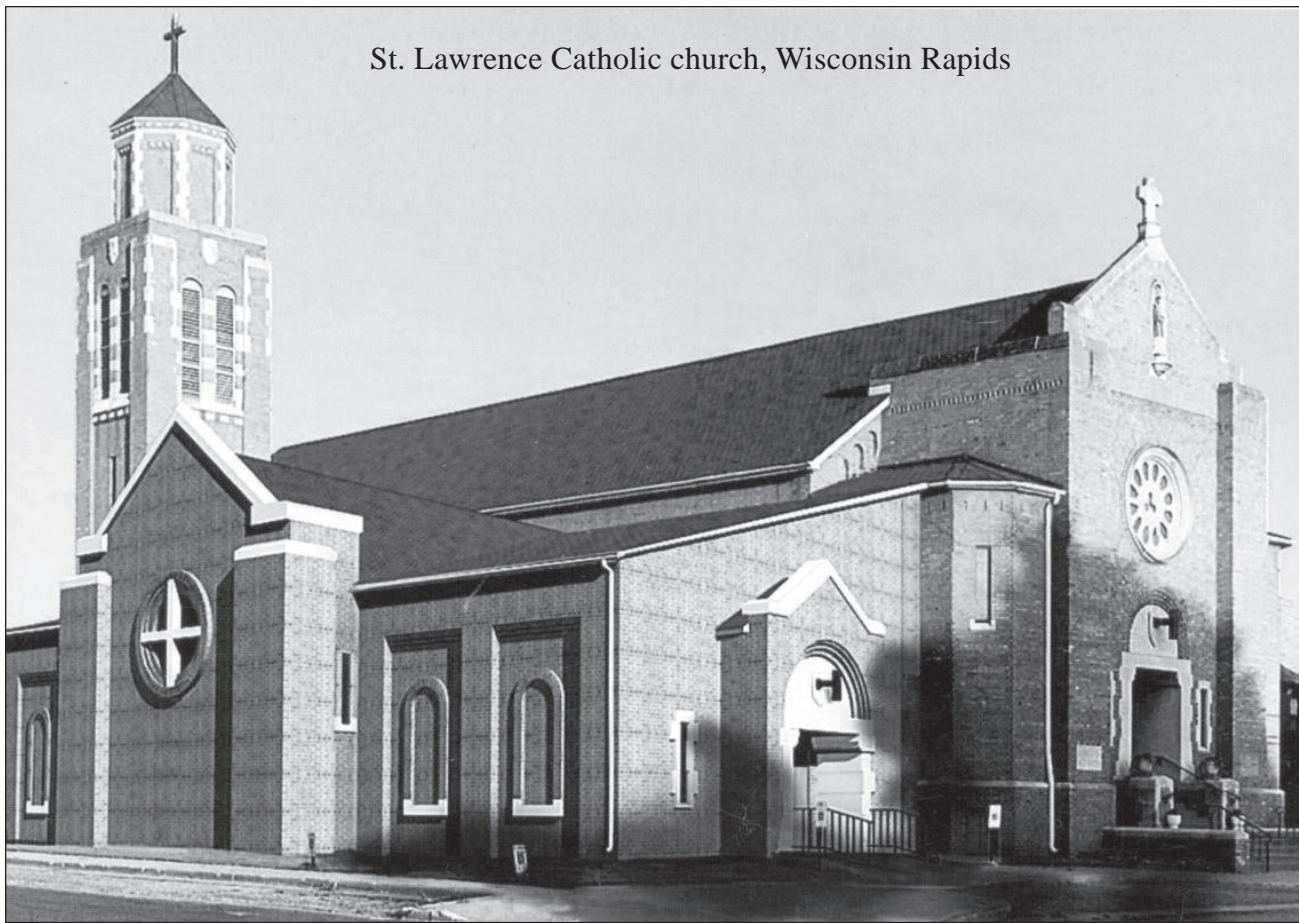
From Diamond Jubilee [of the school] booklet, 1975





1975





St. Lawrence Catholic church, Wisconsin Rapids

The *Tribune* returned to the subject of the St. Lawrence church building on Nov. 8, 1940.

“High above the rose window is a beaming stone cross, while just below that is the niche for a statue of St. Lawrence. Just over the door is a tablet bearing the Latin insignia, ‘Haec Est Domus Dei et Porta Coeli,’ or ‘This Is a House of God and Gate of Heaven.’”

The *Tribune* reported that numerous church dignitaries and fellow priests attended and that a crowd of 1,500 walked through the church on dedication day.

By 1940, the parish was out of debt from the building of the new structure with the help of interested citizens such as Isaac Witter who donated \$1,000, and George W. Mead who donated \$500.

Having come to St. Lawrence after the untimely death of Father Ciszewski, in 1941 and the entry of the U.S. into World War II, Father Mieczkowski in 1943 announced plans to join the Army as a Chaplain, leaving Rev. Peter Rombalski to take

over as pastor.

While plans were put on hold for a new gymnasium and playground for the school, the church grew in membership. By the end of 1943, 39 new families enrolled and brought membership to 174 households.

Following national trends, in 1971, the school lost its three remaining Felician sisters and continued with lay teachers.

In 1974 a conventionally-modern one-story school was constructed across 10th Avenue from the church that today offers child care and preschool as part of Assumption Catholic Schools and serves as a host site for the Wisconsin Rapids public school 4K program.

Felician Sisters
in typical habits





Photo from *ancestry.com*

Oct. 11, 1928, La Salle, Ill.

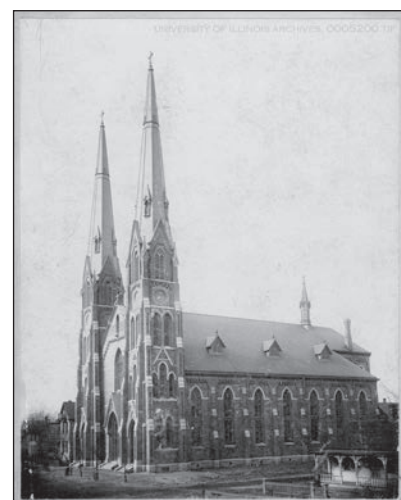
50th Wedding Anniversary of Michael and Frances Waligora (sitting; with their living children, left to right: Sister Mary Laura (aka Apolonia, Pauline, the first of the siblings born in the U.S.), Michael Jr., Ignatius (Iggy), Frances (nee Glowacki), Leo, Lawrence, Sister Mary Georgiana (aka Mary Wiridianna Maria Waligora)

Sister Apolonia

In 1930, when Pauline Waligora served St. Lawrence Catholic church and school, Wisconsin Rapids, she was 45 years old. The next we hear of her is June 26, 1955, when she celebrated her 50th year in religious service at Mother of Good Counsel Convent, Chicago, Ill., at which she would spend the remainder of her days.

At age 77, on Feb. 4, 1963, she died in the infirmary and was buried alongside her biological sister, who also served as a Felician nun—at St. Adalbert Catholic Cemetery in Niles, just north of Chicago. St. Adalbert is the largest Catholic Cemetery in the Archdiocese of Chicago, started in 1872 to serve the large Polish population of the area.

It seems fitting that Pauline was buried in a cemetery named after the Patron Saint of Bohemia, Poland and Prussia. Her headstone reads, “S. M. Laura Apolonia Waligora, ‘W Zakonie 57 Lat,’ which translates from Polish to ‘In the Order 57 years.’”



Pauline's home church, St. Hyacinth, La Salle, Ill. (University of Illinois)



The convent, converted in 1984 to a Family Center, has been razed.

Regular *Artifacts* contributor Bill Hartley (LHS '63) says he used to go to the parking lot below with a pocket of pennies, hoping to meet girls who needed change for the meters. "It never panned out, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.

"They are mostly non-descript cars from the period, like 4-door family cars. I do see a cool looking old black coupe in about the third row on the left, could be a '40 Ford. I see a '56 Mercury two-tone two-door in the center of the picture.

"And I see a 'bathtub' Nash in the center, just past that 59 Chevy. The Nash was unique in that no father would let his daughter date anyone driving a bathtub Nash, because their advertisement of the day was that the front seats would fold down and make the interior of the car into a double bed. You could even get accessory mattresses to make them a little more comfy.



West Side "market square" parking lot west of the Tribune building in the vicinity of the later Rapids Mall. On photo: Marling Lumber Co., 250 3rd Ave. S., Fletcher barber shop, 240 3rd Ave. S.

“Cars in that era were very iconic. You could identify the year and make quite easily, not like now when everything looks alike and cars aren’t redesigned for several years. I remember getting an “arrow” in Cub Scouts for identifying a certain number of cars’ make and model year. The problem was that my Mom, the den mother and judge, didn’t have a clue if I was right or wrong (I was right).

“In my mind, the classic in the photo is the ’57 Chevy. Even though it is a four-door sedan ‘family car,’ it is the most enduring design that still commands high dollars today. And I still think the ’59 Chevys with their flat fins are just plain weird.”





Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune

No doubt, the swimmers are fresh from the Biron community swimming pool.

1972 Daily Tribune:

Biron Park Store: a glimpse of the past and simpler times

Tribune Photos by Dave Rude

Story by Tom Martens

What ever happened to the old fashioned grocery store? – that store-of-old, where a person could buy a nickel Popsicle, a single-dipper ice cream cone for five cents, or do the shopping, and get two hours of good conversation, the local news and possibly even some groceries?

In these days of “super stores,” the old-fashioned grocery store has nearly slipped into extinction.

There is still a little store in the village of Biron, The Biron Park Store, where the flavor of the days-gone-by still remains.

Looking quite a bit as it must have in 1920, when purchased by the present owner’s father, the store remains a favorite summer stop for streams of children returning from the village pool. The throngs of muffians [*sic*] can still buy penny “jawbreakers,” one-cent “red hots,” or help themselves to an open pop cooler, and spend the afternoon drinking Orange Crush on the front porch. Only a pot bellied stove and a few spittoons are missing from the Biron Park Store as it was 50 years ago.

The proprietor, Mrs. Jessie Brandt, has been working in the store since 1922, shortly after her father purchased the business. Now 70 years old, she orders groceries, runs the two gas pumps in front of the store, knows all the neighborhood children by name, and keeps a continual dialog with her customers.

Mrs. Brandt came to Biron when she was 11 years old, back in 1913, and has seen considerable change since.

"When we first came to Biron, the paper mill was much smaller. There were only two paper making machines back then," Mrs. Brandt said.

"The farmers would drag logs with horses, and skids in front of the store, then two men, one at each end of a log, would carry them down to the river." She reminisced, while waiting on customers.

"There were men from the mill back then, carrying boxes, strung from shoulder straps around their necks, who would take hot lunches to the men working with the logs."

"Sometimes the logs would be stacked higher than the dike," she said. "There were only two streets, and very few houses around the store. At times the streets got pretty crowded."

The building housing the Biron Park Store, in its present location across from the Biron mill, was built in 1903 by John Possley. It was then located at the corner of North Biron Dr. and Eagle Rd. and was used as a saloon and dance hall.

Consolidated Papers Inc. bought the building in 1919, and moved the saloon hall to the location across from the mill. The dance hall portion is still on the corner, and being used as a warehouse by the Biron Cranberry Co.



Alex Muir converted the tavern into a grocery store in 1919, and ran the store for a year. Mrs. Brandt's father, Bart Gaffney, purchased the stock and store equipment in 1920. She first began helping as a clerk in the store in 1922, 50 years ago, until her father's death in 1939, when she began managing the store full time.

"My daughter did help out, after I took over the store," Mrs. Brandt said. "But after awhile, she got married and had nine children and couldn't do much anymore." In 1963, her daughter, Mrs. Harvey Kempfert, who lives in a neighboring house, helped run the store again.

Amid a steady flow of workers from the Biron mill, swimmers, and local town people doing their shopping the bright eyed shopkeeper and her family continue their duties at Biron Park Store.

Mrs. Brandt, who has six great-grandchildren, works daily in the store. Asked when she is going to retire, she quipped, "Oh not for a while yet. Running the store is my social life and I like to meet the people. Once, I set 75 as my age to retire, but now that I'm getting close to that age, I may have to move it back a bit."

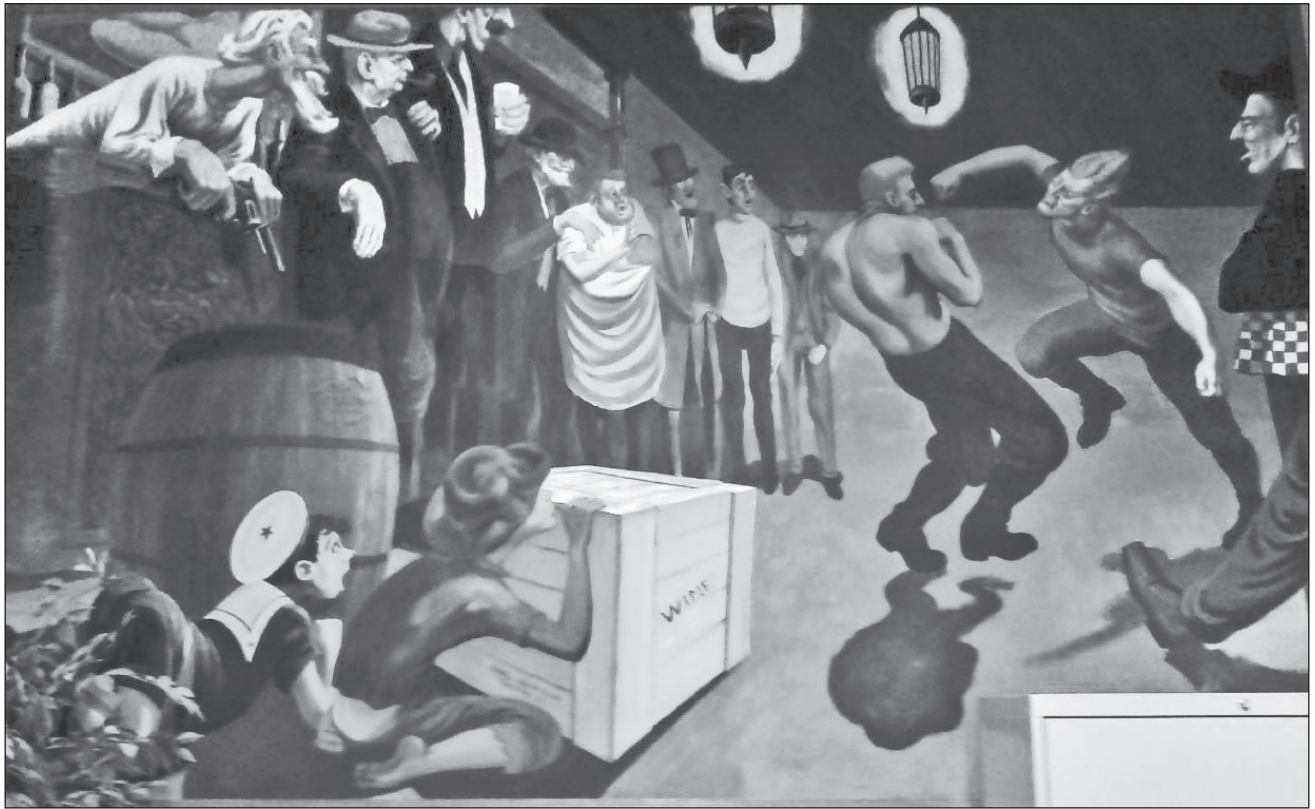
According to an article in the Consolidated Papers, Inc. newsletter, *Consolidated News*, published in Feb. 1927, "this store carries a complete line of groceries, meats, merchandise, candies, ice cream, soft drinks and auto accessories, and has given the village first class service and saved many a villager a ride to Wisconsin Rapids for every day necessities."

The Biron Park Store is still the only store in the village and is providing the same service. [1972]

Mrs. Jessie Brandt at Biron Park Store



The SWCHC Museum general store exhibit contains this photo and a similar invoice filing unit.



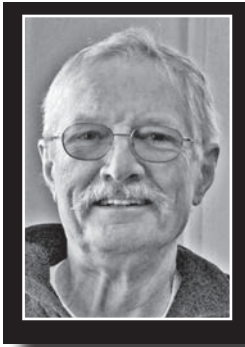
The Other Pfiffner Murals



Artifacts #49 featured photographs of murals painted by E.J. Pfiffner in what was then the Stanton Mead home on Second Street South, Wisconsin Rapids. The publication provoked an impromptu visit by the *Artifacts* editor to a second set of Pfiffner murals at the old Whiting hotel in Stevens Point, now housing the offices of Berkshire Hathaway, a firm that has preserved and restored the unique art work. An accommodating receptionist, a tour by a VP and snapshots with a cell phone by Museum archivist Kathy Engel resulted in the illustrations shown here.



Whiting Hotel, Stevens Point, now an office building (1939 postcard)



Barry Jens

Yard Art



What is the big hunk of iron sitting next to the northwest part of the Museum parking lot?

It is the action part of a James Leffel hydro-electric turbine water wheel.

The James Leffel Company was located in Springfield, Ohio, and furnished many of the hydro-electric water wheels found in our area.

The hydro-electric water wheels locally came in two styles: vertical shaft, and horizontal shaft. Our artifact is from a vertical shaft water wheel in which the flowing river water enters horizontally and drops vertically through the water wheel, spinning it as it does. At the top is an electric generator, driven by the spinning shaft.

The museum unit is stored upside down. But, in its original installation it spun a shaft that might have powered an electrical generator, or perhaps a pulp wood grinder. Again the water entered horizontally through the gates and dropped vertically, spinning the runner as it did so.

The James Leffel Company was founded in 1862. The name Leffel appears quite early in local history and is part of a Grand Rapids

Tribune newspaper article dated September 8, 1877, describing the John Edwards sawmill company in Port Edwards:

“The mill is propelled by the aid of two Leffel 66-inch water-wheels, each of about 120 horse power—the one running a rotary, a cross-cut and a shingle mill; the other a double rotary, gang edgers, lath mill, etc.

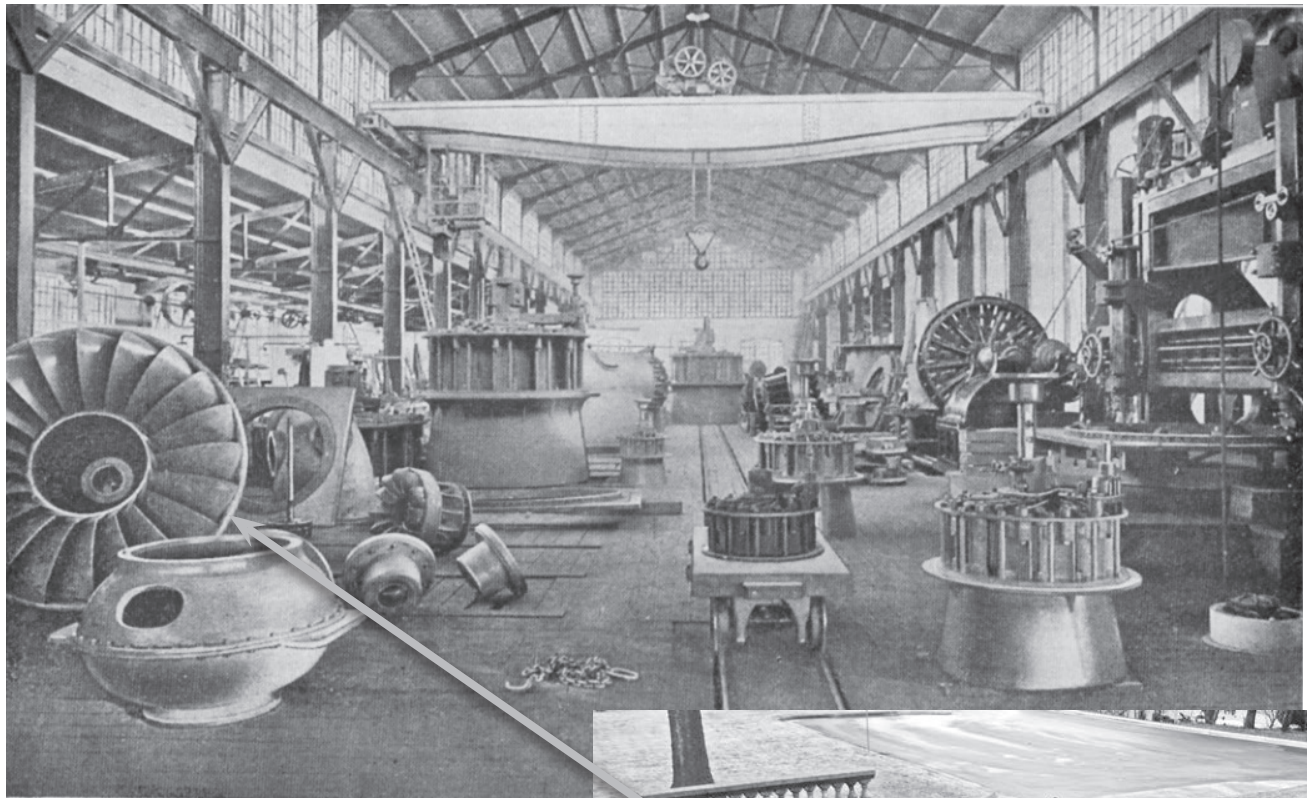
The shingle mill was put in about two weeks since, and the quality of its product we have never seen surpassed anywhere. The ‘Star’ shingles cannot be excelled in any respect.”

And, further on in the article:

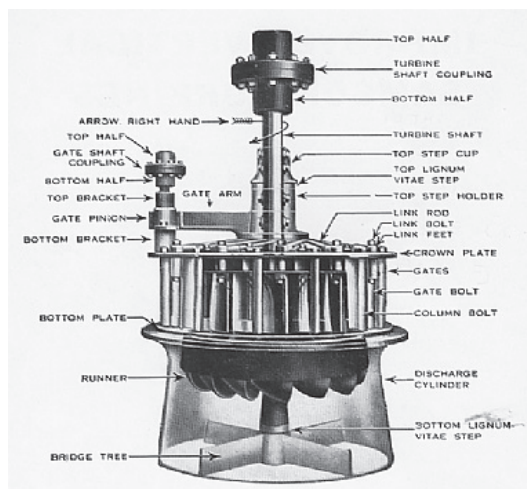
“The firm—which we had neglected to say consists of John Edwards and Senator Thos. B. Scott—contemplate important improvements in their mill the coming winter, by which its capacity will be doubled. Both of the present water-wheels

will be connected to the main shaft, and new and improved machinery added. Another Leffel wheel, of 46 horse power, will be placed in position to run a double-block shingle mill, which is calculated to cut 60 thousand shingles per day.”





Leffel turbine factory



Note on the illustration above is an item called “Bottom Lignum Vitae Step.” Hydro-electric water wheels are unique in that they require a bearing located under water. Initially, they probably were made from local oak trees. Later they were made from Lignum Vitae, a hard wood obtained from South America. Lignum Vitae is still used today for these underwater bearings.



Objet d'art on Museum grounds

In the 1980s then-director (Uncle) Dave Engel was approached by a representative of a paper company, which he recalls as Consolidated, who thought the object was an artistic representative of the paper industry. Dave's remembered it being described as the turbine or waterwheel of the last grinder at the Biron mill. The big hunk of iron was put in place with help from Wisconsin Rapids city crews, above the bluff from a piece of the old Grand Avenue Bridge, visible at rear. It was put in place by Dave's dad, Don, with the aid of volunteer Dick Goldamer.



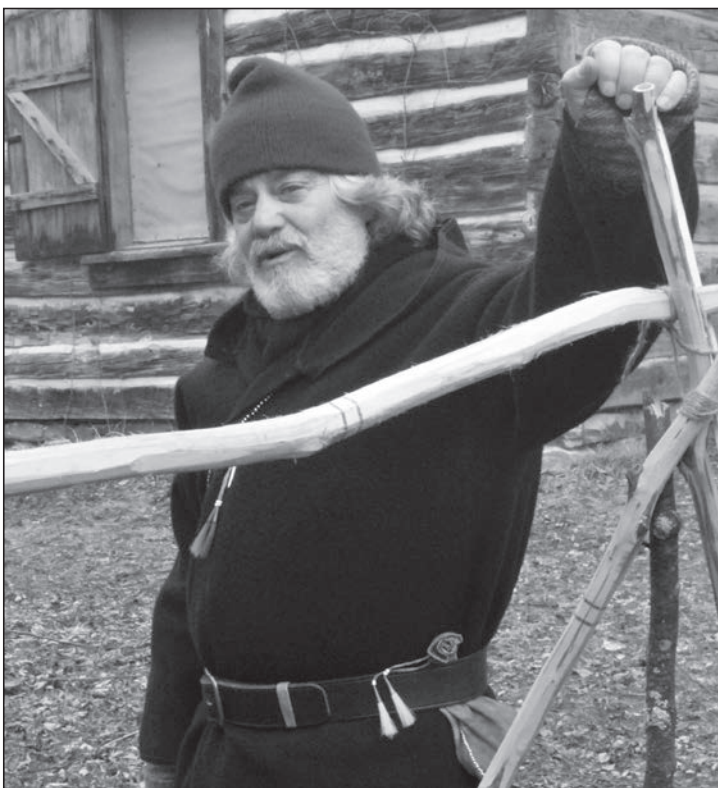
March 25, 2017, photos by (Uncle) Dave Engel

Long time volunteer Tom Brehmer, former owner of Herschleb's ice cream parlor, Wisconsin Rapids, personifies fur trader Pierre Chaurrette, shown above at Historic Point Basse.

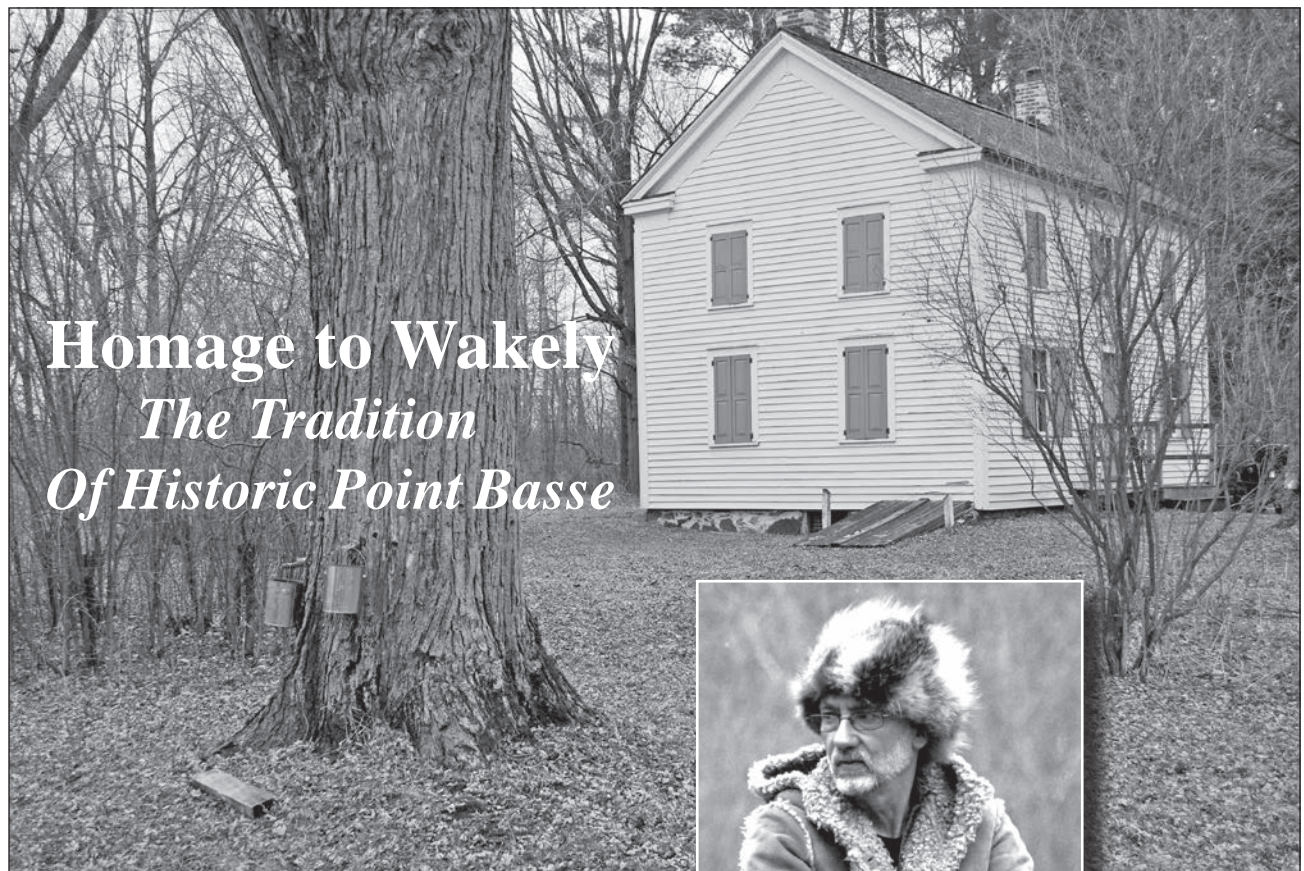
Sugar Bush

Downstream from Nekoosa on the east bank of the Wisconsin lies Historic Point Basse, a rustic complement to our own mansion-style Museum. The pioneer assemblage operates on enthusiasm for living history and volunteer power to create and maintain a premier folk village. The group was founded 32 years ago by *Artifacts* editor (Uncle) Dave Engel, SWCHC president Wally Ives and local builder David Teske.

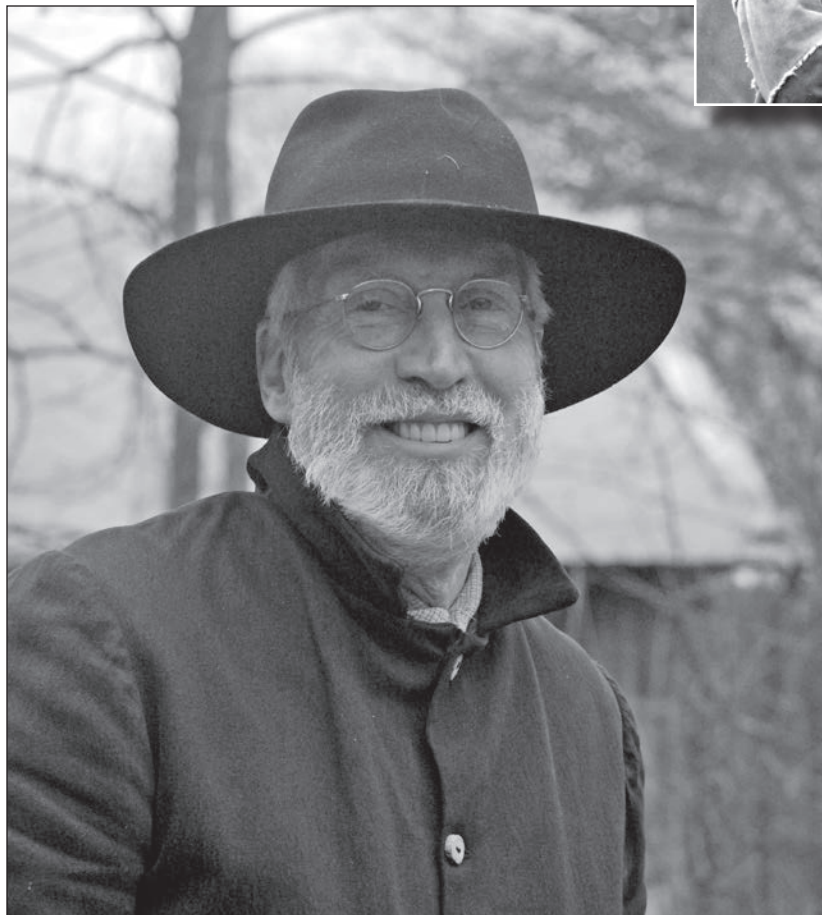
Photos here were taken at the annual maple sugar making fest.



Joe Greco, Voyageur



A fur trade era re-enactor stops at the Wakely house, centerpiece of the Historic Point Basse complex. Robert and Mary Wakely built an inn on the property in 1837, just after an 1836 treaty that made land along the river available.



Michael Hittner, seen here as Robert Wakely, has been an affable and durable spokesman for Historic Point Basse in the years since he and Uncle Dave conspired in the back room of Hittner's Family Natural Foods.

*The Patriarch***REINHOLD**

By Scott Brehm

Vesper Correspondent

My family history has been ingrained in the Vesper area for well over 100 years. I have written many stories in *Artifacts* relating to the area and my family. Here is the story that started my interest not only in Vesper history but in my own history. My descendants came from Norway and Germany on my mother's side. They came from Bohemia and Germany on my father's side.

THE BREHM IMMIGRATION

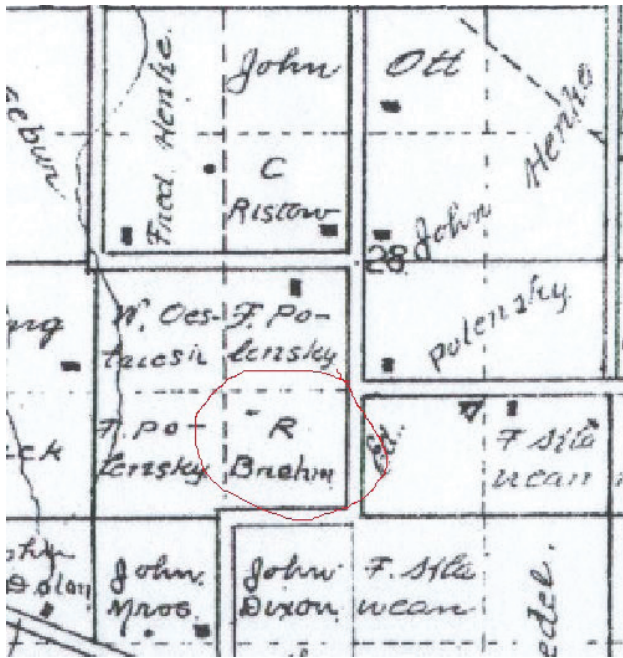
Reinhold Brehm was born Sept. 14, 1855, in Prussia. His wife, Amelia Apple, (or Appel), was born May 13, 1852, in Prussia. Reinhold and Amelia married in 1878 and lived in Nue-Ansbach Brandenburg, Prussia, which is now Germany. Three children, Anna, Louise and Karl (Charles), were born there.

Reinhold packed up his wife and children and made the trek to Hamburg, Germany, on the way to America. The hardship must have been great since his children were very young. Anna was five years old, Louise was three and little Karl was nine months old.

Amelia's father's name was William Apple. Records show some of her family also came to America in the early days and also settled in the Town of Sigel to join many members of the Prussian/German Lutheran church.




From Hamburg, Germany, the Brehms departed on the Steamship Wieland.



The Brehms arrived in New York Harbor on Sept. 12, 1885. They settled in the Town of Sigel, Wood County, Wis., like so many before, on a farm—40 acres at the T-intersection of St. John's Road and Knuth Road. (Back in 1890, what is now county highway HH tied into Henke Road instead of going to State Highway 13.)

Reinhold was well-known in these parts and highly spoken of in the local papers. He was one of the founding fathers of the St. John's Lutheran church in the town of Sigel and a founding member of Seneca Sigel Insurance which is still present today in Vesper.

He was a stonemason by trade and oversaw the building of the brick overlay on the old Wood County Courthouse at right. 



On May 14, 1898, Reinhold helped add three feet on the wall bordering the Wisconsin River near what is now First Street North in Wisconsin Rapids at \$2.35 per cord. The wall is still standing 118 years later.





In 1899, a year before his death, Reinhold secured the contract for the mason work on the Moravian church on First Avenue South, Wisconsin Rapids.

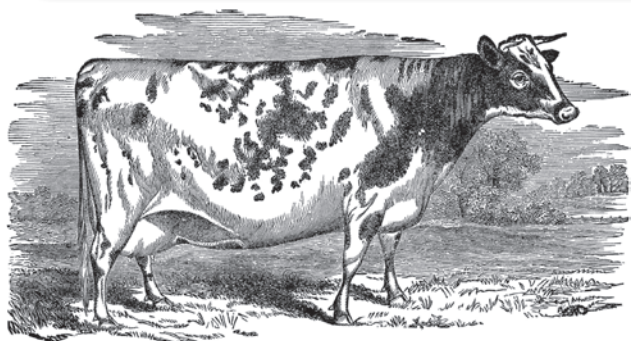


The photo with identification on the previous page was taken shortly before Reinhold's death in 1900. Some descendants were told he killed himself. Reinhold's obituary stated he was taken to Manitowoc for treatment. He had been ailing for the past year and had been prostrated two months prior to his death. Reinhold, at 44, had been 15 years in America.

Reinhold Brehm, a stone mason and a well known resident of the town of Seneca, was taken to a hospital at Manitowoc last Tuesday evening. Mr. Brehm's health has been impaired by overwork and he goes to the hospital to see what can be done in the way of regaining his lost strength.

Grand Rapids
newspaper

Reinhold left behind a stonemason business, a 40-acre farm, his wife and seven children. Each one of the children has left an impact on central Wisconsin. Their stories will be featured in future *Artifacts*.



Notice

Is hereby given to the farmers of the town of Sigel that we, the undersigned, of said town, hereby remonstrate against any stock of any kind being allowed to run at large or on any public highway, and if owners of stock allow it to run at large, they will be prosecuted for damages according to law.

Signed by Julius Matthews, John Schuetz, Herman Yager, John Tomczyk, Fred Brostowitz, Reinhold Brehm, Peter Moberg, M. Hanson, Claus Johnson, Andrew Fisher, F. C. Henke, Wm. Henke, Lorance Joywiak, Jos. Jagodzinsky, Thos. Hanifin, Simon Stelmacher, Henry Kummie, N. Johnson, C. F. Ecklund, Wm. Scott, John Andrew, Frank Lubeck, F. Hell.

Emblematic of the flood of German immigration to central Wisconsin is this Feb 4, 1899, item in a Wisconsin Rapids newspaper.

List of German Books.

Following is a list of the books printed in the German language which have recently been added to the T. B. Scott Free Public Library. These books are now ready for circulation and will be given out by the librarian on the same terms and conditions as other books are given out. They are intended especially for people of German nationality who have not yet mastered the English language, and it is hoped that the opportunity thus afforded will be made the most of, so that the library board will feel justified in extending this feature of the library:

Auerbach—Auf der Höhe.
Dahn, Felix—Ein Kampf um Rom.
Ebers, Georg—Ein Aegyptische Königstochter.
Ebers, Georg—Uarda.
Ebner-Eschenbach—Margarete.
Eckstein, Ernst—Die Claudier.
Eschstruth—Ganseliesel.

More Hang Outs

Ed Severson
LHS '64

August 1969

I tremendously enjoyed the February 2017 *Artifacts*, especially Bill Hartley's contribution. I believe I am the same age as Bill, but I graduated in 1964.

There are differences. I never had any encounters with the Wisconsin Rapids police. I never went in Fisher's Cycle as I thought it was too mysterious. I bought a manual transmission from Joslin's for my 1953 Chevy. The Friendly, Liska's Sinclair (I knew Don's brother Roger because I inherited his paper route), Art's, Wilpolt's, Milwaukee Road depot, Portesi's, Lake Wazeecha and Herschleb's were all hang outs.

I would like to add some other businesses or entities to his list. They weren't necessarily hang outs, but they were places many of our parents' generation (1940s and 50s) and their sons and daughters (1950s and 60s) went to quite often.

Wisconsin Theater

On West Grand Avenue. As with all theaters of its time, you bought your ticket(s) from a young person (often someone you knew) in a booth outside the entrance. You entered a somewhat long hallway with the concession stand on your left. There were two entrances to the seats plus a separate stairway to the balcony. That was where many couples went.

The Wisconsin had ample seating in comfortable chairs and a rather large screen.

The Rapids Theater

On East Grand Avenue across from the Wood County Bank. Again an outside booth but a small entryway with the concession stand right in front of you. This theater was not plush and it was much smaller. Still, the movies were good. The theater was owned by the Greek owner of the Sugar Bowl restaurant. He often would sell the tickets himself to keep his costs down. Not really a couple's theater as there was not a balcony.

Buzz's Bar

This "18-year-old" beer bar was on Grand Avenue directly across the street from City Hall. This was the beer bar I went to when I turned 18 on Sept. 25, 1963, when I was still a senior in high school.

Many 18+ year-olds went there to hang out, drink, play pool and play cards. Buzz Bouton, the owner, was a gracious, friendly man who employed many "responsible" older teenagers as bartenders. My favorite youth hang out.

Robby's Hamburgers

Robby's, one of a small chain, was the first fast food "joint" in Wisconsin Rapids. Because of the quickness of service and low prices, it was a major draw. They had their own "Big Mac" which was priced at 75 cents. There was no drive through and only one order window. Kentucky Fried Chicken came in later.

Dairy Queen

On East Grand only two blocks from Lincoln High School, so it was popular as an afternoon snack stop. No one thought about fat and calories then, so the bigger the cone, the better. It is still operating.

Baker Drive A&W

The root beer stand on Baker Drive was very close to Herschleb's [ice cream] and offered some competition during the warm months. It had car hops and also serving-windows on half of the perimeter. Then a frosty 12-ounce root beer was 5 cents. A&W opened and closed many times over the years.



Swimming Pool

The unheated public swimming pool was located on Second Street North by the Wisconsin river dam. It was popular with any age group and had a wading pool for young kids, a pool house, two low diving boards and one high dive. A favorite pastime was to do the cannonball off the high dive with the goal of getting the lifeguard wet. It was also known to have “midnight swims.” Wisconsin Rapids removed it in 2010.

Witter Field Ice Skating

The ice skating rink on Witter Field included a warming house. The rink was large enough to accommodate about 150 skaters. Teen boys brought their girlfriends there at no cost. Still exists with a much better warming house.

J.C. Penney

On Second Street N. next to Daly Drug. The store was mostly frequented by women. My mother often took us kids there. It was conservative in its offerings and low priced. The unique thing about it was that when you paid, the money was sent up (to an unknown location) via vacuum tubes to produce the receipt and any charges. They also had a huge catalog. They were closed on Sunday and on Saturday afternoons during the summer.

Montgomery Ward

“Monkey Wards,” on the corner of First Avenue and West Grand was three stories. It catered to men as it was full of tools and mechanical things. My dad would take us boys. Never the girls. I believe that whenever he went ‘downtown,’ he always stopped there even if he didn’t buy anything. That store and the whole chain is long gone.

Johnson Hills

This four-story building, including a sizeable mezzanine, was located on the corner of West Grand and Third Avenues. It catered to every taste and included a full-service grocery store in the basement. With clothing, shoes, furniture, bedding, a hair salon, shoe repair, travel shop and jewelry, this store was a step above J.C. Penney in terms of quality and service. It even had an elevator and

a winding staircase behind the elevator that we would run up and down. The building is now converted into offices.

Woolworth's

The “Five and Dime” store was located across from Johnson Hills. In a sense, it was the forerunner of the Dollar Stores of this era, full of imports from Japan. My mother took us there to find unusual items at a low price. That store and the whole chain are long gone. It also had a lunch counter – very popular.



1963

Woolco

Located where Walmart first went in and where the Centralia Center is now located. Woolco and Walmart were parts of a regional chain of “discount stores.”

Woolco featured many of the same choices as a regular department store but at much lower prices. Some of the choices were name brands such as Whirlpool. They also featured the “Top 40” 45 RPM records which they changed every week. At 25 cents per record. I bought a few.

The Woolco stores in the U.S. were closed in 1983.

South Wood County Historical Corp.
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Artifacts, a local history magazine by the South Wood County Historical Corp. welcomes submissions of writings and photographs relevant to the Wisconsin Rapids area. For a year's subscription and SWCHC membership send \$25 to the address above. Contact: (Uncle) Dave Engel, editor, dave@swch-museum.com or Lori Brost, Museum Administrator and assistant editor, 715-423-1580 or lori@swch-museum.com.



Fischer's Dairy, Wisconsin Rapids