

October 2019

Volume II #57

# ARTIFACTS



Cover: Jim, Fred and Dave Patrykus, 1949; Exner/Nixon by Phil Brown, p. 2; Laird by Uncle Dave, 3; Patrykus, 4-7; Thalacker, 8-11; Kids of Sand Hill, 12-13; empty seat, 14; Grand Rapids misc., 15; Airport photo 16-17; Nepco Tri-Motor and Major Mulzer, 18-19; Tri-City Airport opening, 20-21; Airport POW camp, 22-23; Airport Circus, Tri-Motor, Endrizzi, 24-25; Farms aerial, 26-27; Whitrock, Melon King, 28-29; Two "Two Mile" Avenues by Angelica Engel, 30-31; Robby's, 32.

## Police Escort

*Rapids top cop Exner had it under control*

By Phil Brown  
SWCHC President

When Vice President Richard Nixon flew in on Nov. 12, 1959, city fathers rolled out the red carpet. Nixon would soon be running for president. But that's not technically why he was here. He had come to honor our own Republican congressman.

Everyone seemed to like Mel Laird, including a solid majority of Republicans and Democrats. The *Daily Tribune*, agreed, "Humbly, and with typical boyish charm, Rep. Melvin R. Laird of Marshfield accepted the tribute of colleagues and friends and the rising acclaim of one of the largest audiences ever to pack Lincoln Fieldhouse.

"Some expressed it, and many others felt it: Laird, being honored by the presence of Richard Nixon, the vice president of the United States, might some day be in a position of similar stature himself." Laird was later, as Secretary of Defense, tasked with ending the Viet Nam war.

Rapids police chief Rudolph "R.J." Exner dictated detailed plans to a typist who was seriously in need of a new typewriter ribbon. Looking at a faint carbon copy that Uncle Dave found in the archives, I can read some familiar names of police officers: Bonow, Zuege, Steege, Sharkey, Pawlik, Krumrei, Spencer, Reiter, Wettstein, Gloden, Walters and Galganski. A couple of these may be sheriff's deputies.

Sgt. Franklin Smith was designated "Official Chauffeur, 1960 Lincoln," referring to his car not his address. Scheduled for 3:30 p.m. at "Alexander Field" were the "Car 29 Escort," with Sgt. Wettstein and the chief aboard. Car 23, "Knuth," would command 4th & E. Grand, and so on as follows:

"Car 29 to radio car 28 to advise if 10-59 [Nixon] is to go to Elks, or Mead. Car 28 to signal Officer at 3rd & E. Grand, and he in turn signal officer at 2nd & Grand. 2:15PM Leave for Hotel Mead, Car 29 to escort from Elks to Mead.

"5:20 Leave Mead Hotel to Assumption H.S. Leave Hotel lot onto 4th St. South to E. Grand. Left on E. Grand to Peppin St. Peppin St. to Lincoln St. Lincoln to Chestnut St. Chestnut St. west to Main Entrance of Assumption."

Pepin Street, east of the Mead, no longer exists.

At 6 p.m., the entourage would leave Assumption high for the Mead and later to Lincoln field house and at 10 p.m. leave Lincoln and return to the Mead for a reception in the South Pacific room or, in cop speak, "Horseshoe to 6th S., 6th Street to Peach, Peach to Pepin, straight across Avenue on Pepin to Oak St. to Oak St. Entrance of Mead at #1."

Finally, the plan was for Sgt. Smith to park the Lincoln in the City Garage to conclude an important and memorable operation.



Patrolman Roger Burmeister, Chief R.J. Exner, Lt. Donald Knuth, Sgt. Edgar Heiser, Sgt. Robert Exner with presidential candidate Richard Nixon.

Photo from *River City Memoirs III*, which also includes a Nixon story



Nov. 13, 1959, *Daily Tribune**Events of November 12, 1959*

## Chats with Mel

By Uncle Dave



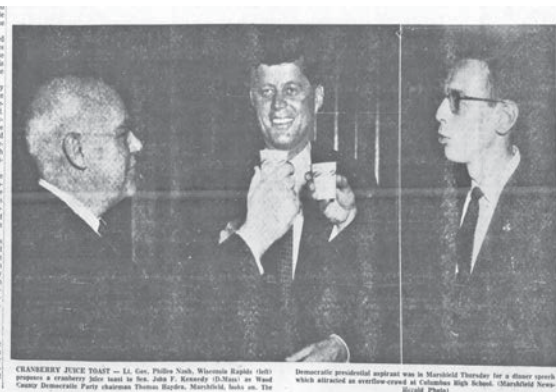
The day Nixon landed at "the airport" was not to be forgotten.

Among thousands watching the big bird swoop into the old runway were a couple of Two Mile Avenue residents. Mill worker Donald Engel and his son David, a freshman at Lincoln high school. After the airport doings, the two proceeded to the Lincoln high school field house to view Nixon and others honoring Congressman Melvin R. Laird Jr.

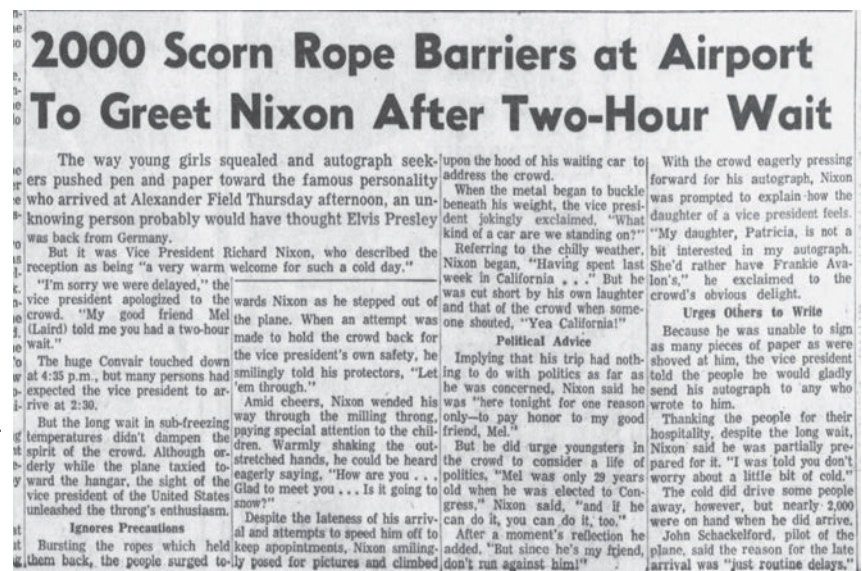
The experience would prove disenchanting for the idol-seeking lad. How could someone so famous and revered by his dad look like a bald-headed plumber and mispronounce Washington as "Warshington?" Laird, not Nixon.

Many years later, I would find that Mel had been a childhood pal of my mother-in-law. As historian, I had long phone conversations with him, one of Wisconsin's most accomplished political figures ever.

The chats were more intimate than expected, probably because Laird seemed to think I was married, not to my actual wife, Kathryn, but to the Marshfield girl Mel had joined for so many pleasant tea parties, my wife's mother, also named Kathryn.



Coincidence? Guess who consumed cranberries in Marshfield the same night Nixon was in Rapids? Democrat and eventually victorious rival in 1960, John F. Kennedy is shown with Philo Nash of Wisconsin Rapids, left.





## Reminiscing with Uncle Dave

By Uncle Dave

*Another go-round with a homeboy*

In February 2019, I got together for some avuncular conversation with Uncle Dave Patrykus. As usual, we talked about the old Two Mile Avenue neighborhood where he and I spent much of what he calls “free range” youth on the borderline between town and country. Nine years my elder, Dave’s memories are one step more rural than mine as he described several farms still operating in the 1940s and showed me their locations, now obscured by post-WWII housing developments in which I was an early resident.

Of particular interest were the long-gone Thacker place at Two Mile Avenue’s junction with the later-laid Lincoln Street, a location I had walked by on my way to Two Mile School; and the still-standing Corey farmhouse and ex-chicken coop on the east

side of 8<sup>th</sup> Street, where prominent educators Silas and Ruth Corey had lived.

(See *River City Memoirs* for an interview with Ruth Bennett Corey.)

In his words, selected:

My parents were Frances and Edward George Patrykus. He was always “E.G.” His brother Michael James was “M.J.” Dad was born in Chicago but grew up near Bancroft.

We had lived on Third Street on Sand Hill the next block south of Pepper until 1943, way up on the wrong side of the tracks; but then in spring 1943 we moved to California.

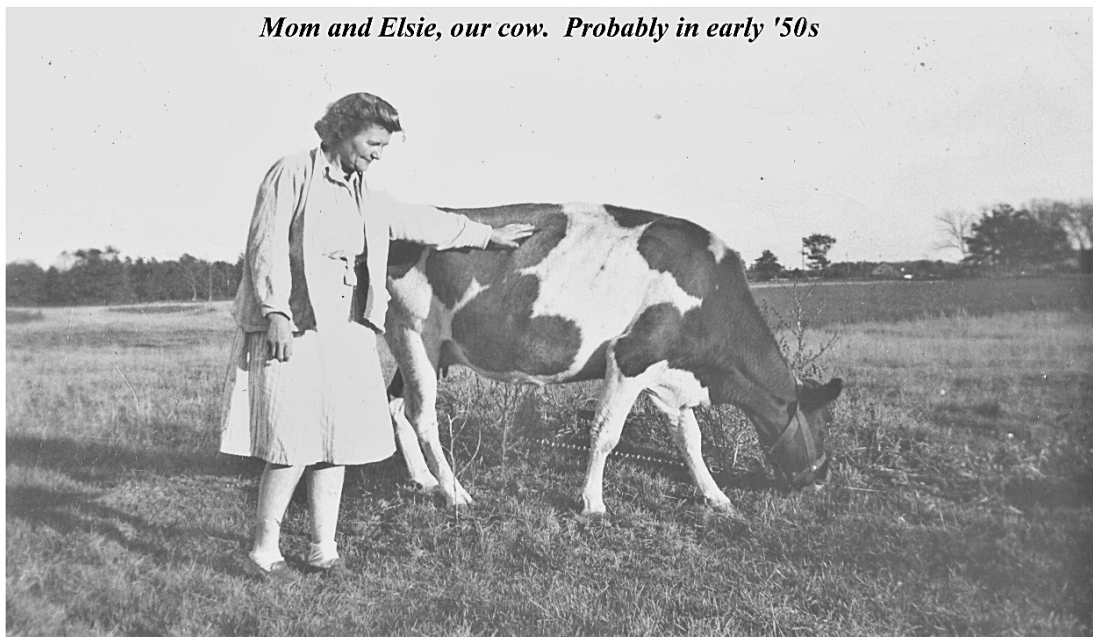
We came back in the spring of 1944 and moved onto the 1200 block of Two Mile Avenue. I lived there until I went in the Navy in 1953, so it was nine years.



See *River City Memoirs* in the *Daily Tribune*, in book form and online for more about Dave Patrykus.

*"Elsie" was named for the mascot of Borden's Dairy. The photo was taken in the field behind our home which has been replaced by a duplex at 1131-1133 East Two Mile Avenue. We also had a flock of chickens and raised several hogs. Regular homesteaders we were...*

*Dave P.*



*Mom and Elsie, our cow. Probably in early '50s*

**Two Mile Avenue** was a dirt road. It wasn't paved until a couple years after we got there. We had an outside toilet. We got our water from a pump. Later on, what had been the pantry was converted to a bathroom.

Mr. **Thalacker** was a farmer out there and I remember when he still had horses. I'm thinking he lived on the southwest quadrant where Lincoln street would later come through Two Mile Avenue. It was across the creek from Murgatroyd's. Thalacker Avenue was taken off the back part of their farm.

It was a big brick home, pretty old. They had cattle at the time.

I remember talking with Mr. Thalacker out along the road.

#### *Looking at a map*

This Thalacker farm here (east of 8<sup>th</sup> Street, south side of Two Mile), I remember that as being the **Gaetke** farm. The Gaetke farmhouse is still there. When we moved there, they had cattle and they were still farming with horses.

And old **Grandpa Witt** was still farming this property that's shown as Hanneman.

We used to spend a lot of time at **Murgatroyd's**, swimming in the pond in the summer, skating there, sledding in the winter time. Some friends of ours, the **Halburs**, lived just east of there. I was friends with Fritz, his name was Alba and we named him Fritz.

Ronnie was a younger brother, there was Bill, and two sisters, one of them Pat, "Patsy." I saw her at a ball game last summer; she doesn't live here anymore.

I ran into Mrs. Murgatroyd just a couple years ago out at the Ridges because she and her husband built

that. She remembered me as being one of the kids, and she told this story:

Young **Billy Lamb** came over to skate one day and it was after a snow fall and the pond was still covered in ice and he trudged up to the back door, knocked and Mrs. Murgatroyd came to the door. She turned the flood lights on and there was little Billy Lamb and he said, "Mrs. Murgatroyd, if you don't shovel the snow off of that ice I won't come back here anymore!"

Murgatroyds plowed it and we skated there. They were real generous to let all the kids go over there. They had iced a sled hill with a ramp built up on top and we would slide down there.

(See *Artifacts* #56 for photos by Gib Endrizzi.)



E.G. and Frances Patrykus, 1951, on Two Mile Avenue



**Fritz Albert** got down and the sled spun around, it was metal, and Fritz was always laughing and giggling; it hit him and the piece of his tongue was just hanging there by a thread and bleeding terribly. But he did have it sewed back on. Johnny [Murgatroyd] was in the insurance business, I'm sure he was covered.

I knew the Murgatroyd boys. They were the age of my youngest brother. They were in the Cub Scouts. **David**, and **Paul**. Paul went on to have quite a career, I think he's retired now but he was working for the World Bank. And Dave was grounds man at the Ridges.

Across Airport Avenue from the Bowlmor, **Margesons** ran a grocery store where the Daly Drug and all that are now. That was one of the neighborhood stores where most people had a charge account. You'd go to the counter and get a loaf of bread. Grocer carts weren't invented yet. They had the old-fashioned boxes where you'd open the cupboard, take out the cookies you wanted and everyone was reaching in there and grabbing cookies.

The **Two Mile Grocery** store was built after we moved onto Two Mile Avenue. That was on the southeast corner of Two Mile and 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Ed and Jane Luedtke** built a lot of the houses in the area. You'd walk onto the job where she was and you wouldn't even have known at first she was a woman. She worked right alongside of her husband and they built homes all over that area. They cut a lot of trees and had a lot of lumber sawed and I think old man Gray sawed the lumber just west of the Two Mile School lot.

When the two of them dressed up to go dance you would say, "there is a nice looking couple." He was a real handsome dude, she was a really attractive woman. But when she was working she wore bib overalls and a flannel shirt with a cap and she could make sawdust fly. **Old man Gray** used to saw their lumber for them, but then later on they developed some of these portable saw mills and they even cut their own lumber.

**Jim Luedtke** played football in UW-Stevens Point. That's where he got the name Moose I think. He used to tend bar at the **Hot Fish Shop** in Point.

Their son **Tom** was in the Army, in Korea, at the time they damn near got run over. The last I knew he was the only one of the family left.

When the Luedtkes first built the Endrizzi house they lived there. (See *Artifacts* #56) They had the lower level entry to the lower level and would let us go in there and warm up when we were skating.

They lived in several of the houses that they built before they eventually sold. There was a little house on top of that hill they lived in for a while. Ed Luedtke built the dam and water wheel; I think that's the fourth generation water wheel.

On Two Mile going east from Lincoln, closer to 8th Street, there were one or two houses. Walkers lived there. And then a guy by the name of **Harry Rucinski** moved in there. He'd been in the highlands in the Pacific. He was a carpenter. When he came home, he'd build a house and they'd live in it. Then they'd move.

At Lincoln going west on the north side, our school principal,

**Palmer Budahl**, lived on the northwest corner of Two Mile and Lincoln and I'm sure that Ed Luedtke built that house and the last one on the top of the hill. Jim was living there as a sophomore in high school and they were living in there when it was brand new.

There was a building just north of Two Mile School, built in the forties. That was

**Berger Larson's Snack Shack**.

They built it and during the years I was at **Bowlmor** a bunch of us kids would get done with the second shift at 11 and we'd stop. We had charge accounts at that Snack Shack. We'd stop and get a burger and malt. When we'd get paid, we'd have to stop and pay our tab at the Snack Shack and it would just about clean us out.

I remember the movies they'd show at the **root beer stand** south from Two mile Avenue. Where Rapids Rental is now.



Edward, David and Frances Patrykus,  
June 1953



The root beer stand

We were sitting at the root beer stand. Me and **Buck Schroeder** were there with my brother Fred and Buck's little brother came over and wanted Buck to buy him something. And he just said, "Quit bothering me and go on home." They lived in a house next to the **Paradise [aka Pair o' Dice] Tavern** across the street from what is Portesi's now.

Anyway, Buck tells his little brother to go on home. And his little brother ran across the street to go home, got hit by a car and killed.

**Portesi's** is what was **Fred and Mary Siegel's Last Round Up**.

It went through two or three owners before Portesi's ended up there [1961].

It was a bar with living quarters. In the dining room, the little cubicle back there was **Nick Siegel's** bedroom. I slept there when we were kids. Nick and I joined the Navy together.

They were from Chicago.

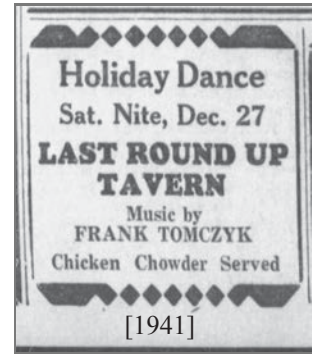
**8<sup>th</sup> Street** was two lane concrete with gravel shoulders. It was a nice street, lined with elm trees all the way. You could walk all the way downtown in the shade of an elm tree. Even though that wasn't the city,

it was the town of Grand Rapids, there was a sidewalk from Two Mile all the way. It ended where the fence was on the corner. I think it went down this far because Sand Hill kids went to Two Mile School. There was no Grove School.

South of Two Mile Avenue, East of 8<sup>th</sup> street, was sparsely populated so most of the kids came from Sand Hill.

The **Darrell and Margaret Whitrocks** lived just on the other side [1440 Two Mile] of the new apartments. They had a big riding stable there and a lot of horses. [Darrell was the son of Wilbur who was the son of Frank, the Melon King.]

**Edward and Sarah Primeau** lived on the creek. The Primeau boys were **Edward Jr. and John**, their dad's name was Edward and his nickname was Oyster. He had several cows and he peddled milk in a little blue Chevy panel truck that had his name on it, "Oyster's Dairy." Their motto was, "You can whip our cream, but you can't beat our milk."



Lois Lee, Jean Gaedtke & Francis Kuhn on the Four Mile Creek bridge  
Griffith Ave., Town of Grand Rapids, summer, 1947



Now Griffith Avenue at the Ridges



## Eatin' Dirt on the Edge of Town The Thalacker Farm

After pursuing a variety of occupations, Paul and Ida Thalacker came to the town of Grand Rapids in 1922 as farmers.

Ida was born Aug. 21, 1878, in the town of Dakota, Waushara county; Paul, April 17, 1880, at Sunny Flats, Marquette county, Wis.

Their granddaughter, Barbara Thalacker, a childhood neighbor of *Artifacts* editor Dave Engel, sent along memories of Paul and Ida compiled by their descendants.

Paul's son, Harold, wrote that, in Dakota, Grandpa Paul owned a tavern and general store and traded horses. The township is also associated with the youth of Rapids industrialist J.D. Witter.

Paul had operated a hotel in Harrisville, Wis., worked in a Wautoma store, farmed near Arpin, ran a store and saloon in Dakota until Prohibition, farmed near Waukesha and operated a store in Rosewood, Wis.

In 1922, he bought a farm at the southeast corner of Highway 13 and Two Mile Avenue, now on the lower East Side of Wisconsin Rapids. After eight years, the Thalackers moved to a farm west of 13 and lived there the rest of their life.

What is now city lots and winding subdivisions was, into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, borderline farming country. Thalacker's, located at 474 Two Mile Avenue about where Lincoln Street crosses now, was fading out as a working farm in 1950 when the Don Engel family, including David, joined the multitudes of post WWII immigrants to the neighborhood.

It was classic old-style agriculture. The sandy soil of the farm was tilled with one horse and a cultivator. Without irrigation, Paul raised corn,

hay, oats, rye, barley and potatoes. The corn and grain were cut by hand, bundled and shocked. Hay was raked with a dump rake pulled by the horse, harvested loose by hand and stored in the same hay barn where animals were butchered for home use and for sale.

Grandchildren visited a one-story brick farmhouse. They were often paid for work on the farm: stirring milk to cool it for delivery, 200

quarts per day; feeding cattle; slopping milk and grain from a barrel into a wooden hog trough for the pigs; turning a crank on a machine shelling corn for the chickens; hoeing potatoes; splitting wood and filling the wood box for Grandma's kitchen range. Corn cobs were piled next to the stove that also heated the house, supplemented by a smaller stove in the dining room. Grandma was busy canning and cooking, sometimes using produce stored under the kitchen in a root cellar. She was also a skilled seamstress.

The atmosphere was old German. When grandchildren and great-grandchildren arrived, a *kleine alte Frau* crooked her index finger and demanded, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" She was Great-grandma

Emma, Paul's mother.

Next to his chair, Grandpa had a brass spittoon shaped like a turtle. If you stepped on the head, the turtle shell would open. Grandpa wore a copper bracelet for arthritis.

Grandpa would disappear on an afternoon for boilermakers at the corner tavern and came back several sheets to the wind and occasionally obnoxious to his children, though, like grandpas throughout history, not to his grandchildren.



*Paul and Ida Thalacker*





Photos provided by Barbara Thalacker

Ida Thalacker, probably at Two Mile Avenue house

Grandchildren cherished memories of a warm cook stove on a brisk fall day; the smell of the potato bin in the cellar in springtime; the chime of the old-time Sessions clock in the dining room; Uncle Lloyd's WWII helmet under the bureau near Grandpa's spittoon; an old box of locks and mismatched keys; metal toys behind the couch in the mostly closed-off front room; Triple-X mints in a drawer.

Granddaughter Barbara remembers eggs and kittens in the hayloft, kittens in the hay, the cellar with the dirt floor fresh and damp and cool on a hot day, Grandpa's rhubarb juice aging, him declaring the potatoes in the bins had eyes and could see in the dark. Grandma's treadle sewing machine in the living room next to the easy chair and spittoon. Kool-aid in the kitchen. Baseball in front of the cow barn.

Despite protests from Grandma, Grandpa let the kids pick and eat carrots without washing them, philosophizing, "You can eat a bushel full of dirt in a lifetime without hurting yourself. I wonder how far along I am."



Ida

Ida died in 1959, after a nine-month illness caused by a stroke.

Paul's bushel filled up April 17, 1960, on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday when he also suffered a stroke — sitting at the kitchen table listening to the Milwaukee Braves baseball game.

Photos courtesy Barbara Thalacker, daughter of Harold and Dorothy



Ida and Paul at back of Two Mile Avenue house





Harold, son of Paul and Ida, and Dorothy Rickman Thalacker in Gib Endrizzi photo. From their residence at the south edge of the old Thalacker farm and on the north bank of the Two Mile Creek, Harold and wife Dorothy carried on a tradition of selling off pieces of the Paul and Ida Thalacker place to make room for the people who live there now.

1973

## \$45,500 Country Estate

Gracious living on 4½ acres. 4 bedrooms. 2½ baths. Large family room plus living room, each with spacious fireplace. Newly redecorated. Ample porches. Two car garage. Out-buildings with boat space, etc. 5 minutes from Wisconsin Rapids. By appointment only.



4051 Sampson St.  
Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.  
Harold and Dorothy Thalacker  
Brokers  
423-7525

Ad for undesignated location.



Paul and Ida Thalacker family from left, birth order in parentheses: Arnold (2), Edwin (7), Lloyd (8), Loretta (Specht) (4), Ida, Paul, Arbie (3), Paul (5), Harold (6), Chester (1)



## Boys and Girls Club of Sand Hill

Even the “free range” kids of the Fifties stood in line for a picture.



Before Grove School was built in 1948 and Woodside in 1959, Two Mile School served the semi-rural area called “Sand Hill” and much of Grand Rapids township.



The cupola from Two Mile School was moved to Woodside School to become a monument in 1991. *Tribune* photo by Dave Engel

Helen and Palmer Budahl, principal of Grove School. *Gib Endrizzi photo*



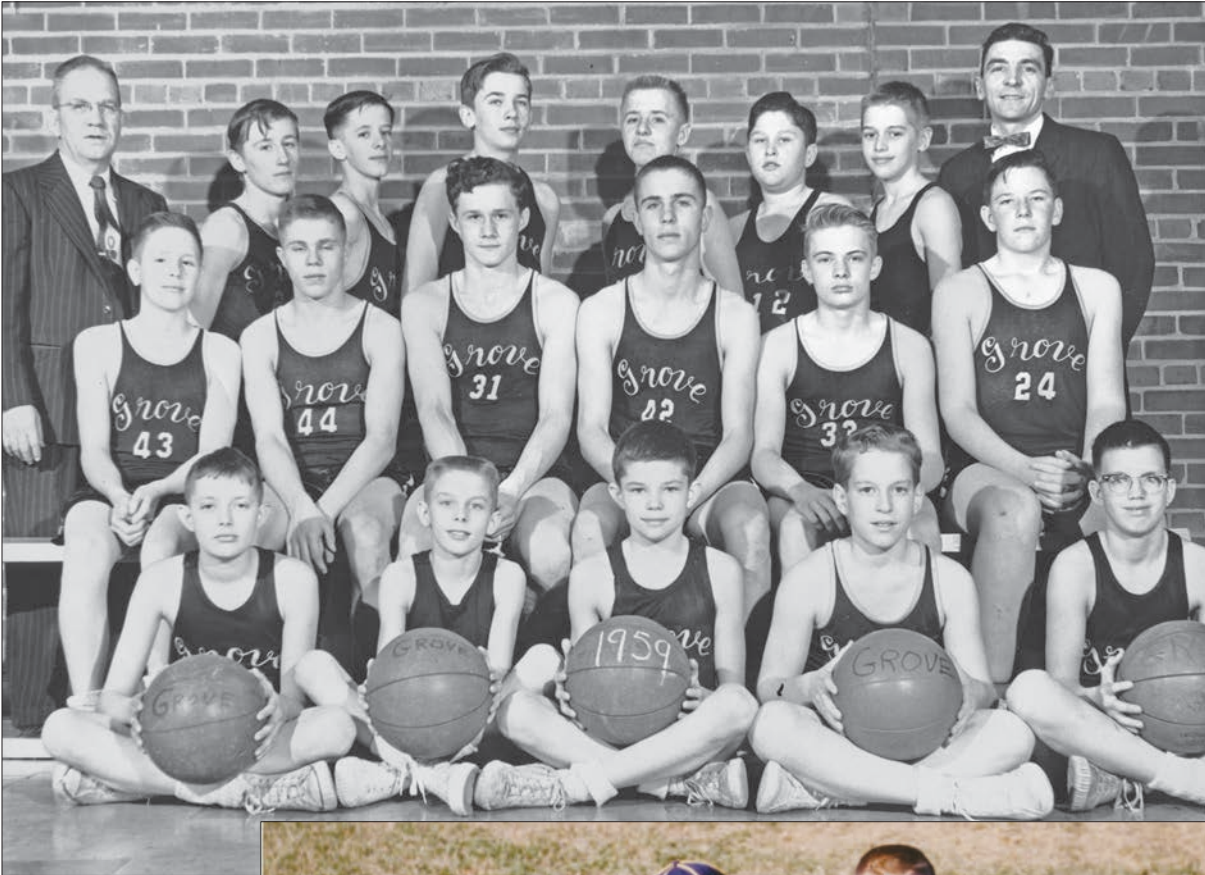
Left: Grove school cheerleaders circa 1955, Darla Wilson, left, and her sister, Mary, center





## Grove Pirates

Rear: Palmer Budahl, principal, Lafe Enkro, David Zimmerman, Arnie Tucs, Francis Spaulding, Dale Arndt, Tom Mitchell, Ray Lecy, coach and teacher. Center: George Zimmerman, Eldon Grimm, Harlan Kramer, Ronald Grimm, Darwin Hodgson, Boyd Sharkey. Bottom row: Mark Oberbeck, Peter Marsh, Robert Calverly, David Engel, Jan Olson.

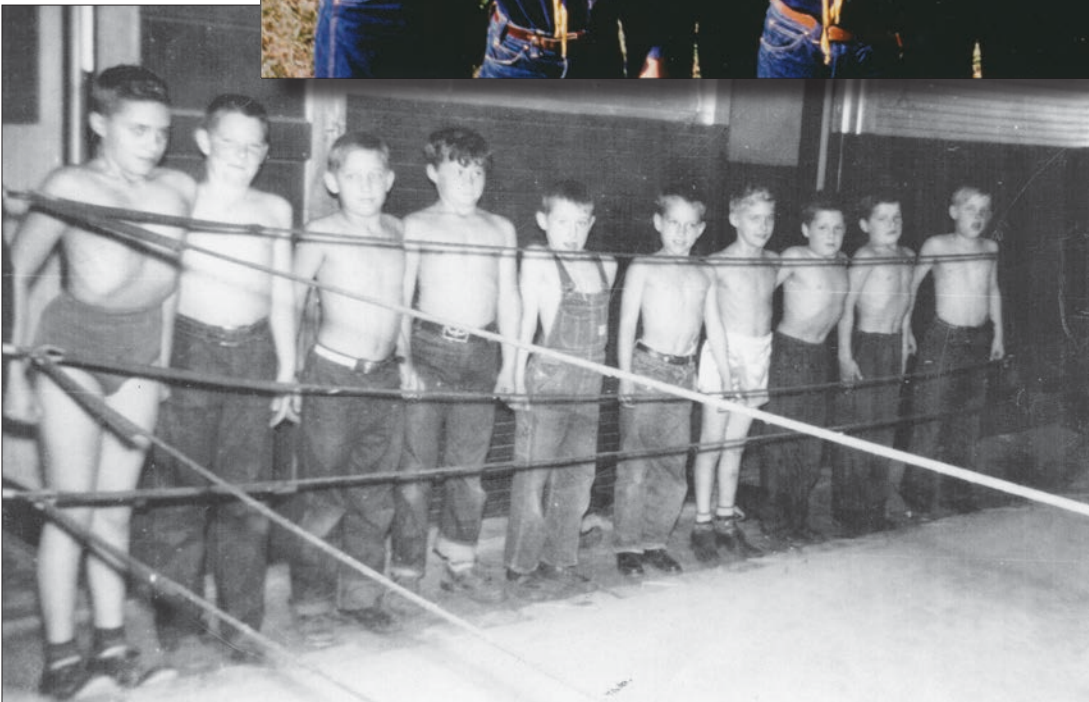


## Two-Finger Salute

circa 1955

Rear: (?), Harlan Kramer, Boyd Sharkey, (?).

Front: David Engel, Lafe Enkro, Clen Brundidge, Bruce Zanow. (?)



## Boxing Lessons

Jerry Calvi, Boyd Sharkey, ?, Harlan Kramer?, Lafe Enkro, David Engel, Dick Calvi, Ronald McCarthy, Dennis McCarthy, Bruce Zanow

Location may have been in a former carriage house behind a Third Street mansion on First Street South.



1946



Overcrowding caused talk of annexation. It happened, but decades later.

By Uncle Dave

## the empty seat:

That day, as usual, I walked the half mile to school, early as usual, waiting by the door facing 8th Street with the usual early comers. After the bell rings, climbing the big stairway as usual into Mrs. Mortenson's room at top left. A lot of as usuals already, three months into first grade.

But something not as usual that day. One desk sat empty.

The next day it was empty again and would be until it was removed.

And I thought through the years that it was a little girl gone, an innocent little blonde girl struck and killed on 8th Street right outside the school, a dangerous crossing but one I didn't have to make.

But my memory as usual was not totally accurate. It wasn't a girl.

On Monday, Nov. 26, 1951, 6-year-old Jerry Schroeder, a first-grader like me, left school at 3 p.m. and started to walk home along what the newspaper said was the east side (though it probably was the west side) of a busy Highway 13, also known as Eighth Street South. With Jerry were his brother, Donald, and Michael "Mikey," Nicholson, also first graders.

As the three passed over the Two Mile Creek bridge south of the school, automobiles approached from both directions.

Then Jerry was running and he fell down and the car dragged him, said Mikey. County Traffic Officer David Sharkey said it was for 100 feet beneath the front axle.

The driver, a fire truck salesman from Milwaukee, noticed small children walking as he slowed to meet a southbound car. The other vehicle passed just as the boy ran across into the path of his machine.

Jerry, one of 12 children, was a few hundred feet from his home.

No inquest was held. Witnesses said the accident was outside the 15-mile-an-hour speed limit and that the driver couldn't stop on the ice-slick pavement.

There were no sidewalks south of Two Mile School.

North of the school, there was a sidewalk but only on what the *Tribune* said was the east side of the highway. It was on the west side, the side with the school that so many of the mostly-new residents walked to every day—as usual.



April 22, 1960

## Grand Rapids Girl Wins County Spelling Contest

Kathy Engel, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Donald A. Engel, 439 Two Mile Ave., and an 8th grade pupil at Woodside School, was the first place winner in the annual Wood County schools spelling bee, held Thursday night in the Biron School.

Second place went to Margaret Glenn, Biron School, while Terry Thompson, Woodside School, took third place. All are in the 8th grade.

Miss Engel won the event over 43 other contestants from 14 schools in the Wood County school system by correctly spelling the words "adjacent," which Miss Glenn missed, and "ingenuity."

Miss Engel will compete in the state contest in Madison in May, and the winner of the state meet will enter the national contest in Washington, D.C., later this spring.



KATHY ENGEL

Kathryn Sarah (1946-88) sister of David, was among the first to graduate from Woodside School.

1947

## Who Knew?

### Truck Hits 2 Cars

An accident Saturday noon involving a truck and two autos in the 300 block on West Grand avenue caused \$245 damage to cars driven by Mayor W. T. Nobles, 60, 220 Clark street, and Joe J. Hopp, 39, 1310 Tenth avenue north, when they were struck by a truck driven by Donald Engel, 29, 520 Clyde street.

Police Chief R. J. Exner, who witnessed the accident, said that Engel was driving east and passing Mayor Nobles' eastbound car as Hopp was driving west. Engel was unable to stop and collided with both cars.

Arraigned that afternoon in Byron B. Conway's justice court, Engel pleaded not guilty to a charge of operating a vehicle with defective brakes and trial was set for April 8.



Donald Engel by Dave Engel, 1955. Every day after work at Consolidated, Don would take a nap before supper which was always at 5 p.m.



Still standing! Rented by the Engel family while building house on Two Mile Avenue.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE—Typical of the flooding experienced in the Wisconsin Rapids area Sunday when about half an inch of rain fell in a 24-hour period is the scene pictured above. The Al Koeshall residence and the Don Engel home, both on Clyde Avenue, town of Grand Rapids, were surrounded by several feet of water, which gave them somewhat the appearance of being houseboats. (Tribune Staff Photo)

March 26, 1950, *Daily Tribune*

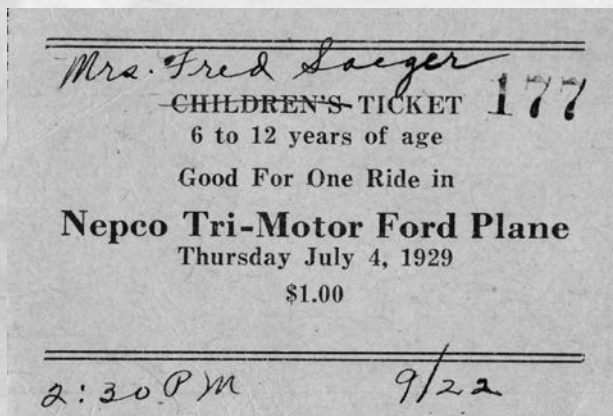
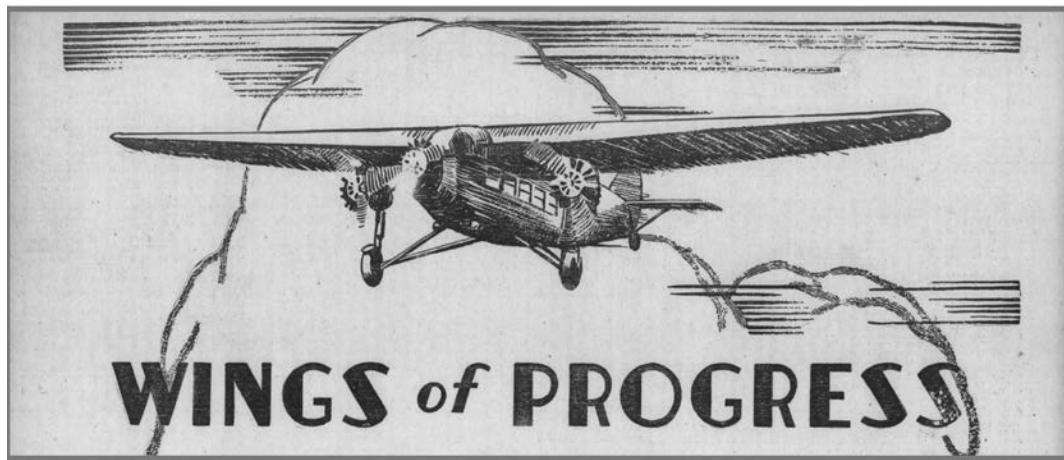
MAY 1939





With the approach of WWII, a military plane, probably a trainer, landed at the Tri-City Airport. At the end of the war in 1945, the airport location would serve as a POW camp.







**Capt. L. G. Mulzer, Aeronautical Engineer of the Local Airport, Chooses U. S. Royal Airplane Tires for His Planes!**

When tires were needed for the many airplanes at the Tri-City airport, Captain Mulzer chose U. S. Royals, because he has used them on his automobile, and knows they will stand up under terrific strain. He bought a 40x10 for the big Nepco Tri-Motor Ford, and four 26x4's for the smaller biplanes.

**-- Attend Air Meet --**  
DON'T FAIL TO ATTEND THE BIG AIR MEET AND CONCERT AT THE AIRPORT ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON. EVERYBODY WILL BE THERE!



**EUGENE MILLER AND SON**  
WE OPERATE EAST SIDE CITIES SERVICE STATION  
(Opp. Library) Telephone 765



You can't talk about the old airport without mentioning the mysterious Major Mulzer, shown above at retirement at Dayton, Ohio, where, as a Brig. General, he was in charge of the military electronics depot. Below left he was a driving figure in the development of the Tri-City airport.

Leslie G. Mulzer had come to Rapids in the mid-1920s as pilot of the Nepco Tri-Motor Ford plane.

A native of Ohio, Mulzer joined the WWI effort in June 1916 and was taught to fly by the French. At the end of the war, he left the Signal Corps and ran Mulzer Flying Service of Columbus, Ohio. Some of that time, he spent in Wisconsin Rapids, Minneapolis and St. Petersburg, Fla.

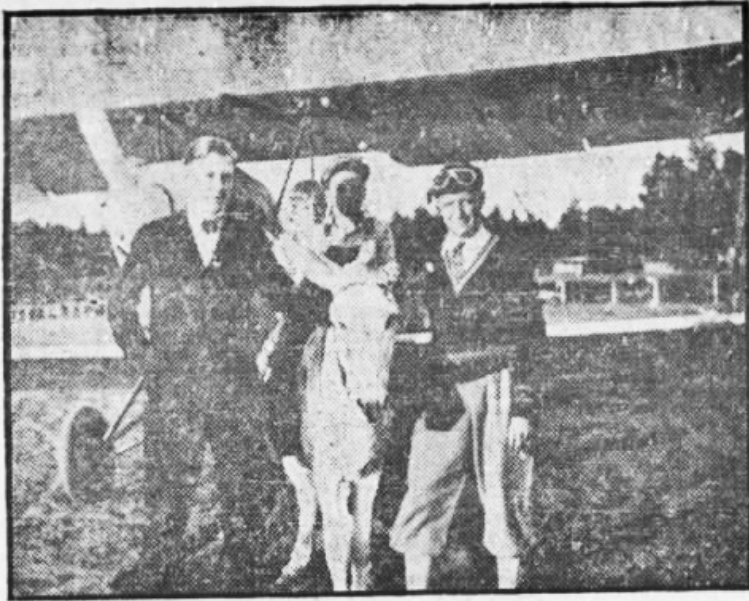
Mulzer was recalled in 1940 to MacDill Field, Fla., and in 1943 to the Oklahoma City Air Depot. During WWII, he was sent on two special missions in the Pacific. He also served in Alaska, Kansas, Colorado, Alabama and Pennsylvania. Mulzer died in 1993 in Colorado at age 96.



The Nepco Tri-Motor Ford was the foundation of the Tri-City Airport that opened with such fanfare in 1928. The airport was associated with the Nekoosa-Edwards paper company and located at the edge of the cartographic Village of Port Edwards village limits at the west end of Two Mile Avenue.



## The Old and the New



The oldest and newest forms of transportation got together at the Tri-City airport the other day for a picture, the result of which is shown above. The burro, whose ancestors were beasts of burden way back in Bible times, is jointly owned by Wesley Snyder, son of Mr. and Mrs. George Snyder, and Lloyd Thalacker, son of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Thalacker, both of them of the town of Grand Rapids. They are seen seated on the animal, while to the right of them is Pilot Russell J. McNow, pilot of the airplane seen in the background. The man on the left is C. E. Otto, managing editor of The Tribune.

## Hoopla!

The *Daily Tribune* dedicated most of an issue to the opening of the Tri-City airport, serving Wisconsin Rapids, Nekoosa and Port Edwards. At left is mentioned Lloyd Thalacker of the Paul Thalacker family featured in this issue. Also shown is *Tribune* managing editor Carl Otto, who had come to the paper in 1926 and was interviewed by Uncle Dave in 1988. Below, Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. heir John Alexander is shown as an army air corps pilot prior to WWI.

### J. E. Alexander as an Army Pilot



Few people of the Tri-Cities realize that John E. Alexander, president of the Tri-City Airways, Inc., was an army pilot just previous to the World war. John enlisted in the army air corps in 1913 and was dispatched to Newport News, Virginia, for initial training instruction. There he remained for a period of nearly three months when the snow became so deep that the flying course had to be discontinued and the students sent to some other flying field.

John was dispatched to the Curtis flying field at Miami, Florida, where he continued his course for the next six months. It was there that he did a great amount of solo flying in the Curtis J-N4 military type biplanes. The picture above shows the president of the Tri-City concern during his flying career at Miami in the winter of 1913. The ship is one of the J-N4's or "Jennies" as they were called.

**Special Rates**  
**YELLOW CAB SERVICE**  
**To The AIRPORT**

Saturday and  
Sunday

**75c**

One to four passengers Sat. and Sunday



Saturday and  
Sunday

**75c**

Sat. and Sun., one to four passengers

**Crowds! Crowds! Ctowns!**

Leave your car at home during the Airport Dedication Days—Use Yellow Cab. On Saturday and Sunday we inaugurate special taxi service to the Airport.

75c fare, one passenger or up to four from any point in the city to Airport or from Airport to the city

Thereafter a REGULAR DAILY SERVICE will be maintained to and from the AIRPORT for 75c (one to three passengers), 25c per passenger extra above three. Use the YELLOW. Clean, comfortable cabs. Careful drivers. Prompt service.

Call **Yellow Cab**  
200





## Clips

1928 Airport Opening  
Oct. 19, 1928, *Daily Tribune*

The ubiquitous Major Mulzer, then a captain, is shown at right with prospective pilots at the airport of Tri-City Airways, Inc. Top: G.D. Fritszinger, J.E. Alexander, E.P. Gleason, Carl Vaughn. Bottom: Lloyd Proll, Don Daly, Capt. L.G. Mulzer, Chief Pilot Russell J. McNown and Jere Witter, son of Isaac and Charlotte Witter, owners of what is now the SWCHC Museum.

Below: Leaders in the airport project. Top: John Alexander, Pres.; I.P. Witter, Vice Pres.; C.E. Briere, Director; G.O. Babcock, Director; G.D. Fritszinger, Sec.-Treas.; E.P. Gleason, Engineer; I.P. Daniels, Director.



The school of aviation being conducted at the airport of the Tri-City Airways, Inc., under the direction of Chief Pilot Russell J. McNown, already has seven students enrolled. The above picture shows the prospective pilots with their instructor and Capt. L. G. Mulzer, aeronautical engineer of the Nekoosa-Edwards Paper company. From left to right they are: top row, G. D. Fritszinger, J. E. Alexander, E. P. Gleason, Carl Vaughn. Bottom row, Lloyd Proll, Don Daly, Capt. L. G. Mulzer, Chief Pilot McNown and Jere Witter.

# Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune

A CONSTRUCTIVE NEWSPAPER

Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., Friday, October 19, 1928.

41 PAGES TODAY

The net paid circulation of  
the Tribune is  
5,805

Price Ten Cents

## AIR LANES LEAD TO CITY TOMORROW

### MacDonald Another Aviation Martyr?

NOTABLES TO BE  
AT DEDICATION  
OF NEW AIRPORT

#### BABY PLANE LONG OVERDUE ON HOP ACROSS ATLANTIC

SLIGHT POSSIBILITY ENGLISH  
FLYER WOULD BE PLACED ON  
FLIGHT UP BY MARY, FEEL  
EXHAUSTED LONG AND

London, October 18.—(AP)—Flames  
that had burned all night at the  
airport and where the plane had  
landed, caused the English  
Commander Sir C. Macdonald  
to be taken to a hospital where he  
was expected to die today and hope  
for his recovery. It was the  
second time that he had been  
in hospital since he was taken  
to the hospital on Oct. 17.

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to the hospital on Oct. 17.

#### Officers, Directors of Tri-City Airways, Inc.



John Alexander, Pres. J. P. Witter, Vice Pres. G. D. Fritszinger, Sec. E. P. Gleason, Engineer



G. D. Fritszinger, Sec. E. P. Gleason, Engineer J. P. Witter, Vice Pres. John Alexander, Pres.

#### Dr. Eckener Has Breakfast with Coolidges

Washington, Oct. 18.—(AP)—The  
official welcome of the national  
control was given today to the  
Hague Convention and that of the  
control on the trans-Atlantic flight  
of the first flight.

The first flight and several of  
its participants were guests of Pres.  
and Mrs. Coolidge at breakfast  
at the White House, where they  
were met by the Secretary of State,  
Mr. Hughes, and the Secretary of  
War, Mr. Duggan. The first flight  
was a great success and the  
participants were all well.

Dr. Eckener was accompanied  
to Washington from Philadelphia  
by his wife and daughter. They  
were met by the Secretary of State,  
Mr. Hughes, and the Secretary of  
War, Mr. Duggan. The first flight  
was a great success and the  
participants were all well.

At the airport, Sir C. Macdonald  
was taken to the hospital where  
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second time that he had been  
in hospital since he was taken  
to the hospital on Oct. 17.

### 200 People See William Hickman Hang On California Gallows

Weather Halts I. P. WITTER DONATES  
Tribune's Air BEACON TO AIRPORT GIRL MURDERER  
DIES 'BRAVELY'

## AIR LANES LEAD TO GOLF RESORT TODAY

The "airport" was conceived by proud local pioneers to serve local people and companies. Due to the Depression, it was soon abandoned, then revived and nearly abandoned again, its glory appropriated by Central Wisconsin Airport at Mosinee.

Recently upgraded through public funding, South Wood County Airport-Alexander Field conveniences out-of state developers transporting clients to out-of-county recreational facilities.

That's the way it goes when you're not the world headquarters of anything any more.



May 16, 1945

Less than 20 years after its auspicious beginning, they lived at the semi-abandoned airport: German prisoners captured at the end of World War II, sent out to solve a labor shortage in cranberry marshes and farm areas.

## POWs



Tribune

**WAR PRISONERS AT WORK**—German war prisoners from the branch camp at the Tri-City port are shown at work on the Potter and Son cranberry marsh in Cranmoor town. This part group is engaged in weeding the area. Prisoner of war labor is helping to solve the critical power shortage in this area and the Germans have thus far proved themselves to be a much better source of labor than were the Jamaicans in 1944. These prisoners work at this and other task eight hours a day and are paid 80 cents a day in canteen coupons. The money collected for work at prevailing wages is paid direct to the United States treasury.



Sign at left below says, “Future Recreation Hall.” Could refer to the old folks pool hall that replaced this building off Township Avenue, where the Grand Rapids Town Hall and Boy Scout buildings used to stand. Believed to be former barracks from POW camp.

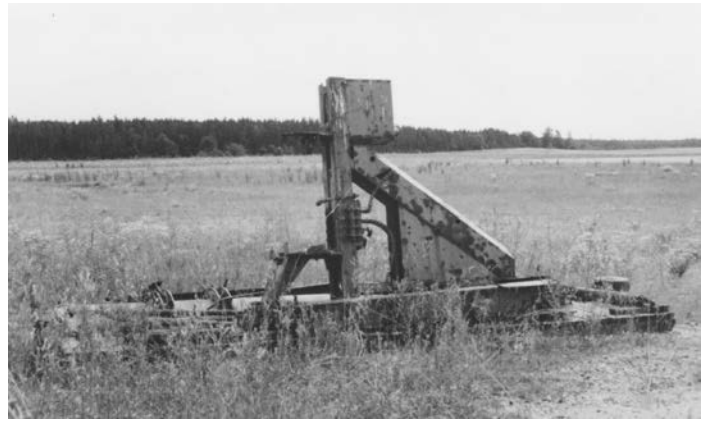


1979

Photos by Uncle Dave in support of a paper written by Charlotte Wright for an American Studies class at UWSP.

Above and below: barracks moved to the Ridges golf course and campground by John Murgatroyd.

Right: POW camp relics at airport.



Behind the hangar



Pylons for water tower



Unused hangar



Rear view of “barracks” showing the route Boy Scouts might take to the roof following their meetings.



Plumbing fixture



# Tri-Motor Revisited

Labor Day 2013



A legend lands again



1958

The day of the big show began with a quick bike ride from the boy's home to the old airport at the end of the road where some of the older, braver kids were helping the circus people stake out the big tents.

At the end of the day, a new interior environment had been created, complete with exotic animals, acrobatic acts, slapstick clowns and jovial music, making up what we call "magic."

The next day, it all returned to what it had been, a weedy field, an abandoned hangar and a tower with a tattered windsock, flapping in the wind.

Was there a cable from a flagpole banging on metal? Seems like there might have been. The biggest sound around, an echo of what was.

**WISCONSIN RAPIDS**  
SATURDAY,  
**AUG. 16**  
**CIRCUS GROUNDS**  
Old Tri-City Airport  
Auspices, Fire Dept.

**WORLD'S LARGEST**  
**Clyde Beatty**  
**3 RING CIRCUS**

**\* CLYDE BEATTY \***  
**BATTLING 40 LIONS AND TIGERS**

**600 PEOPLE** **12 ACRES**  
**OF TENTS**

**150 CIRCUS ARTISTS**  
**200 WILD ANIMALS**  
**15-ELEPHANTS-15**  
**\$8,500 DAILY EXPENSE**  
**\$1,750,000 INVESTED**

Twice Daily 2 & 8 p.m. Doors Open 1 & 7 P.M.

**ADULTS \$1.50 — CHILDREN 90c**

RESERVED AND ADMISSION TICKETS  
ON SALE CIRCUS DAY AT  
CHURCH'S DRUG STORE  
3rd & W. Grand Ave.

## Big Top to Return Here With Clyde Beatty Circus

Saturday is circus day in this community, when the bands play, the red wagons roll, and the big top rises against the skyline at the Tri-City Airport.

The Clyde Beatty Circus will be here for afternoon and evening performances under auspices of the Wisconsin Rapids Firemen's Assn.

Its tented wonderland is in keeping with nostalgic American tradition. For, since the Ringling show last year took to exhibiting indoors, the Clyde Beatty Circus has moved largely onto the Ringling coast-to-coast "under canvas" route.

### Due Before Dawn

The two large motor caravans transporting the show are due to arrive in Wisconsin Rapids before dawn, coming from Green Bay, where performances are being given today.

The 600 people with the circus will be at breakfast in the dining tent from about 6 to 10 a.m., with the drivers and the men who lay out the lot and pitch the tents being first at the table. Performers and staff folks breakfast at their convenience, but the animal men feed and water their menagerie and performing charges before

they themselves attack the eggs and hot cakes.

Stars of the show include Clyde Beatty, world famous wild animal trainer; Alexander Konyot, internationally acclaimed horseman; Josephine Berosini, renowned empress of the high wire; Hugo Zaccini, the original "human cannonball" who is fired across the big top in the grand finale of the program; Labelle Attilana, Spain's somersaulting madcap of the tight wire; the Victors, high flying pinwheels of the aerial comedy bars; Asia's Ming Toy, in a slide-for-life from the top of the tent, suspended by her hair; and many others.

A number of the performers are former Ringling celebrities.

Following Saturday night's performance, the circus will depart for La Crosse to keep a Sunday booking.

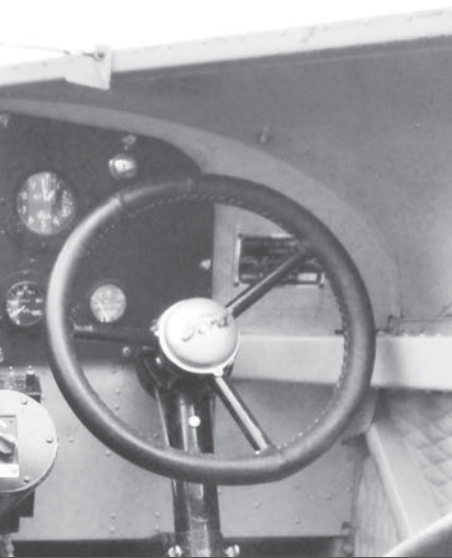
## MARKET REPORTS

### 5-DAY FORECAST

WISCONSIN—Temperatures will average 2-3 degrees below normal. Normal high 74-80 north, 80-83 south. Normal low 52-57 north, 57-61 south. Moderately cool through period except briefly warmer Sunday and again about Wednesday. Precipitation will average



At Alexander  
Field, Wisconsin  
Rapids,  
“the airport”



Photos by UD



After Tri-City airport was resurrected as Alexander Field, served by Midstate airline, Two Mile Avenue's Gilbert Endrizzi posed with the pilot, probably on his way to Chicago for the Consoweld laminate company. Uncle Dave's parents were able to walk from their Two Mile Avenue home to the airport and embark for Hawaii.



# Farms No More

2013 photo shot from a Tri-Motor Ford of what was, in Dave Patrykus' youth, a combination of dwindling farm land and developing subdivisions. The current city limits of Wisconsin Rapids mostly at right (north) are separated by a haphazard boundary from the town of Grand Rapids, center and left.

1. Engel boyhood home
2. Woodside School
3. Site of Two Mile School, now U.S. Bank
4. Murgatroyd's pond
5. Thalacker's farm site
6. Grove School
7. Patrykus boyhood home site
8. Former Whitrock house
9. Marked area approximates Whitrock farm
10. Former Corey house
11. Snack Shack site
12. Margeson's grocery site
13. Brave's root beer stand site
14. Portesi's/Siegel's Last Round-up
15. Thalacker/Gaetke farmhouse







Photo by UD



## Frank Whitrock: MELON KING

Mark, Marx or Max Whitrock, according to the 1923 *History of Wood County*, was born in Denmark although most sources say Germany. Not long after he arrived in 1846 under the name "Wittrock," the name changed to "Whitrock."

Mark first farmed in Jefferson County, as did the *Artifacts* editor's own German ancestors, the Frederick Engels, at the same time. Mark and Mary Whitrock moved on to Stockton township, Portage county, in 1854 and soon to Grand Rapids Section 22, east of the city. He was said to be the third farmer to settle in Wood county.

Of 15 children, one was Charles, the hapless parent of Laura Whitrock Corrigan, who became rich and famous. Another son was Frank, the Melon King.

Frank was born June 19, 1854, in Stockton. Several years later, his parents moved to Grand Rapids, where Frank attended local schools until, at 14, he went to work at the Vesper shingle mill. In 1874, he bought his parents' homestead and farmed for 12 years while also exploring the Midwest.

In 1886, he sold the home farm and tried Minnesota and the Dakotas, returning in 1888 to buy 80 acres in Sections 28 and 29, Grand Rapids, while working for F.M. MacKinnon in Rapids.

In 1886, Frank married Minnie Habeck of Sigel. About 1893, Whitrocks purchased land and built what would be known as the "melon farm," half a mile east of Two Mile school.

On Aug. 29, 1895, Frank sent samples of "Peerless" watermelons to the *Tribune* which noted he was also growing Nutmeg and "canelope muskmelons," all "beauties and greatly relished by ye editor's family."

An 1896 Grand Rapids newspaper said, "Evidently Frank Whitrock's farm home about two miles from town is the popular rendezvous for people who go out for Sunday drives. And why not, when Frank has such a large patch of juicy water and musk melons for an attraction." The *Wood County Reporter* counted 27

covered carriages, 19 open buggies, nine Democrat wagons and four farm wagons in one day between one and six p.m., in which Whitrock disposed of over 1,000 melons from his 16 acre patch.

1906 was a good year for the 15 acres of melons, the entire crop of which was consumed by the people of this city and vicinity, no portion of it being shipped.

A September 1908 visit to the melon farm by a reporter found "our genial neighbor of the town of Grand Rapids in just as optimistic frame of mind as ever." Mr. Whitrock, said the *Tribune*, had about 12,000 muskmelons on the vines about ready to ripen. He also had a large number of watermelons.

In 1916, a *Stevens Point Journal* called the Whitrock farm the mecca of melon lovers, one of the largest of the kind in the state. Whitrock had seven acres of melons and sometimes planted as high as 24 acres.

"The word melon always suggests the associated word 'cooning' but the Whitrock farm is a dangerous place for

'cooners,' [night-time produce thieves] said the *Journal*, after Whitrock established an guard armed with a shotgun and buckshot. A Friday night raid had resulted in a shooting but no one was known to be injured.

In 1919, Whitrock sold the farm to J.E. Knight, of Plover, and retired.

Eight years later, James Slage, 18, "colored," who had been a porter at the Hotel Witter and Wallace Daugherty, 17, were arrested for breaking into the soft drink parlor of the Harvey Gee building. Daugherty was arrested at the Whitrock watermelon farm, southeast of town where he had been working for Louis Johnson, the overseer.

When Frank Alexander Whitrock died in 1930 at his residence on Eighth Street South, services were held at the Germanic East Side (Immanuel) Lutheran church. He had been a county board member for 13 years and clerk of the school district.

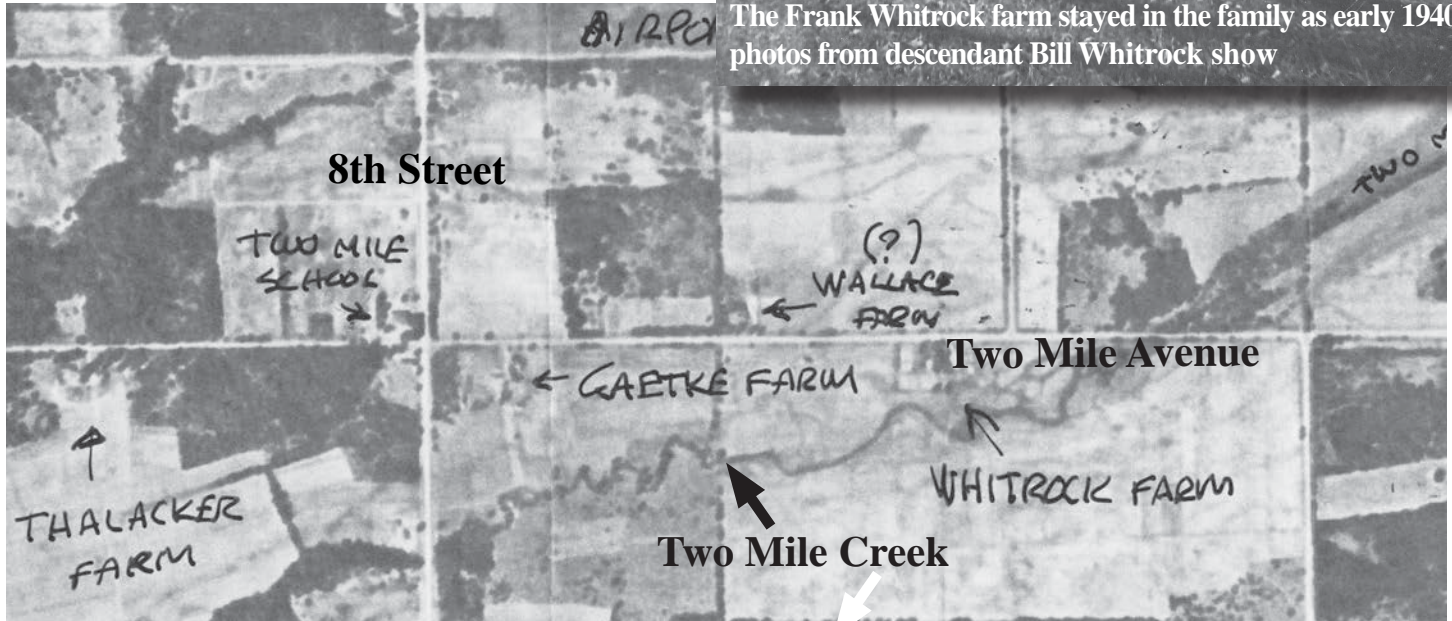
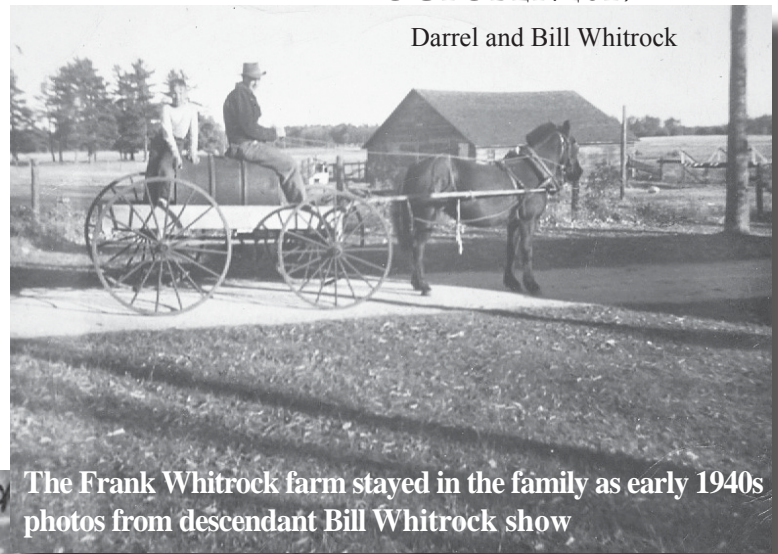


Wilbur, Frank's son, and Angie Whitrock on Two Mile Avenue, 1940s



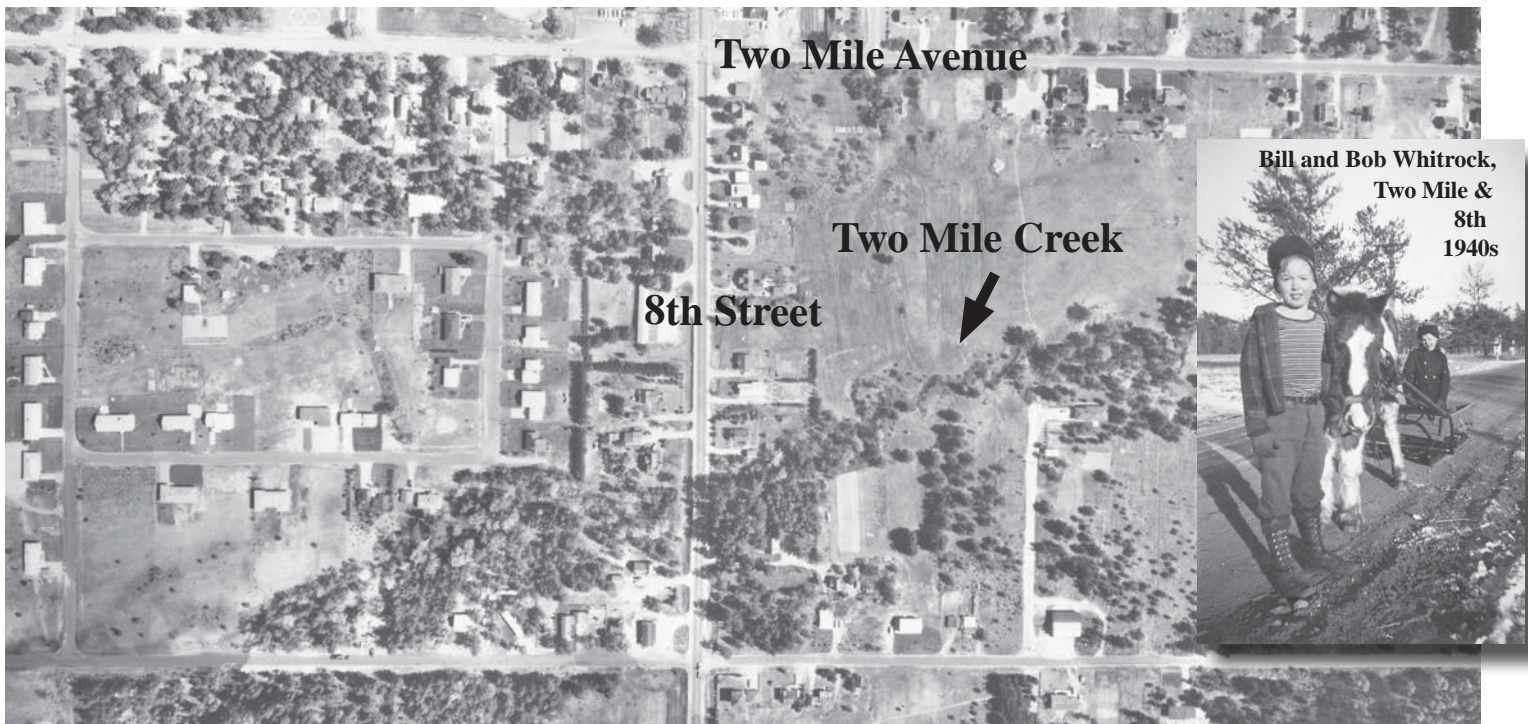
In September 1932, when fire destroyed the garage on “the old Whitrock farm, occupied by Harvey Hartjes,” ownership was attributed to William Otten, Chicago, who did not have insurance. About that time, federal agents raided a small “wildcat brewery” in the milk house and Hartjes was ordered to appear in federal court at Wausau. “A number of beer kegs” were destroyed and “a quantity of beer confiscated.”

Hartjes, of Little Chute, was charged with violating the prohibition laws by operating a “beer plant” at Wisconsin Rapids and admitted his identity and guilt.



Dave Patrykus provided 1938 aerial photo above, marking landmarks from p. 5

1938



DOT aerial photo shows the familiar rectangular pattern of mid-century housing developments at left in the area of the former Thalacker farm.

1963



# *A Tale of "Two Mile" Avenues*

By Angelica Engel

Website Coordinator

Like my father, "Uncle" Dave Engel, I grew up on the edge of country and town—on six acres of woodland and fields that he has owned on Third Avenue, Rudolph, since 1976. Like his Two Mile Avenue home, it was "two miles" to the city limits of Wisconsin Rapids, in this case, to the southwest.

My memories from the years before attending West Junior High have a shimmery, ancient, nostalgic feeling. The black streak of road stretches away into the distance with deep ditches on either side of the grassy shoulder. In spring, water flows through the ditches like parallel creeks.

Two of our three driveways were gravel. I can hear in my mind the clear sound of the car tires crunching as we returned from a long trip.

Our third driveway, much further from the house, started out as gravel but was overgrown with grass and weeds. It led to uninhabited marsh, a grassy field, and forests.

My father built our wood-sided, one-story house during an energy crisis, when self-sufficiency seemed a much higher priority. Thus, we heated with a wood-burning stove. My parents still heat this way. I can still hear the squeak of the stove door opening and shutting and smell the smoke dissipating in the wind outside.

On the south side, an old man named Earl lived in a trailer house. My dad and I often walked on a path through the woods that separated us, to see Earl's cat and the small wooden boats he worked on in his barn.

Our yard seemed magically large. So many places felt inhabited by older spirits and I thought I'd never be able to find those specific nooks again, as though the glades moved around on their own volition.

The village of Rudolph struck me as bizarre; how close together the buildings were. My dad watched as

our kindergarten class walked to the post office on a field trip, the cheese factory just down the street.

The west side of the Rudolph Elementary school yard ended in a hilltop that was also the beginning of the village. On the other three sides, the wind blew strong across boundless farm fields. I enjoyed peeking around the corner of the school building at recess, getting a face full of bitterly cold wind, and then ducking back to the leeward side of the building.

When I was six, a family with kids my age moved into the old farmhouse across the road. I befriended the middle child, just a little younger than me. Katrina and I sat together on the long bus rides home from school, pretending our hands were mice or playing with plastic toys that she brought from Happy Meals.

Also, I read on the bus, big books that I often finished in three days. I remember hot days when we would open the windows and the hot air would blow in, smelling like farms.

The bus drivers would sometimes have to shout at people to sit down. Sometimes the bus would go really fast over a bump and we would fly into the air.

The vistas over the hills around Rudolph were sunny hazy fields. I liked to see where people lived, mostly old farm houses or tumble-down modern houses with additions and discarded items decorating the yards—just like my home.

My friend Harley's house was on a big hill. She and her dad had recently moved in, and the only furniture upstairs was in Harley's bedroom where her mattress was on the floor. The emptiness of the rooms felt like a blank slate whereas the interior of my own house felt permanent and eternal, set in stone before I was born.

My neighbor Katrina's family owned a massive woods of 80 acres. I'd only been to a tiny portion of



it. They had a lot of cats hanging around and I always wanted to keep one. But we had a dog and that was enough, my dad said. Queenie, a Shetland sheepdog, would run circles around me. Sometimes I would run back at her and dodge when she came after me. This would really rile her up.

Queenie was friendly. Sometimes too friendly. I called her “Nose poke.”

I didn’t have farm work to do, but I did help my dad with yard work, such as clearing up the trees he felled and stacking firewood.

Sometimes I’d be at Katrina’s when she did her chores, feeding the sheep, cows and rabbits.

I remember walking on a gravel road in hot, humid weather. Looking at the crayfish in the creek with Katrina and her brother. Riding my bike against the

relentless wind, a herd of cows gazing laconically toward me.

The sound of a dog in the distance. The sound of a train. The sound and smell of the paper mill to the south. Katrina’s mom dinging a bell to try to get the kids to come in. Birds. A chain saw, a lawn mower, gunshots here and there.

A good place to grow up. I miss it now that I live in Madison. As I write this, the constant “whoosh” of cars on a damp busy street contrasts with these memories.

At least for the time being, I can go back to Third Avenue, Rudolph. Unlike on Two Mile Avenue, not much has changed. The ambience still feels eternal.



Photo by Uncle Dad

Angelica and Kathy Engel heading north toward Rudolph on Third Avenue, 1996

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

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*Artifacts* is published by the South Wood County Historical Corp., 540 3rd St. S., Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494. For a subscription and SWCHC membership send \$25. Dave Engel, editor, [dave@southwoodcountyhistory.org](mailto:dave@southwoodcountyhistory.org); Lori Brost, Museum Administrator, 715-423-1580; [lori@southwoodcountyhistory.org](mailto:lori@southwoodcountyhistory.org).



Opened in 1963 as the second of Ralph Roberts' chain, Robby's had been the first McDonald's-style fast food joint in town, shown here about 1973 just before being razed. It was located near the site of the later Shopko store. *Tribune* photo scanned by C. Henry Bruse