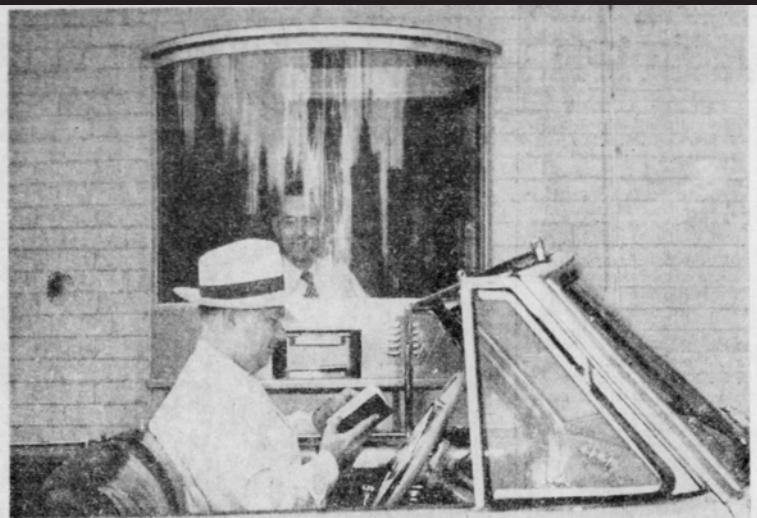




Cover and page 2, Wisconsin Rapids First National Bank, Drive-In window, 1950; First National Bank, pp.3-8; Junior Bankers (& Citizens Bank), 9; Bank people, 10-11; Harry Ciaciura, 12-14; First National Bank 15-17; Bank clock, 18-19; NEPCO flight school, 20-21; Virginia Whittlesey, 22-23; Sampson Canning, 24; Jim Sampson, 25-29; Sampson's, 30-32.



Drive-In 1950



FIRST DEPOSITOR—William Boehme, 360 West Grand avenue, was the first depositor to use the new drive-in window at the rear of the First National bank, entrance to which is from Third avenue south. The window will be opened to the general public Monday. W. J. Miscoll, assistant cashier, is shown at the window in this first test of the new facility. (Tribune Photo)

## Drive-In Banking Window To Go Into Service Monday

“Spider” Boehme of the Brig at window shown on cover



1962  
Freestanding  
Drive-In

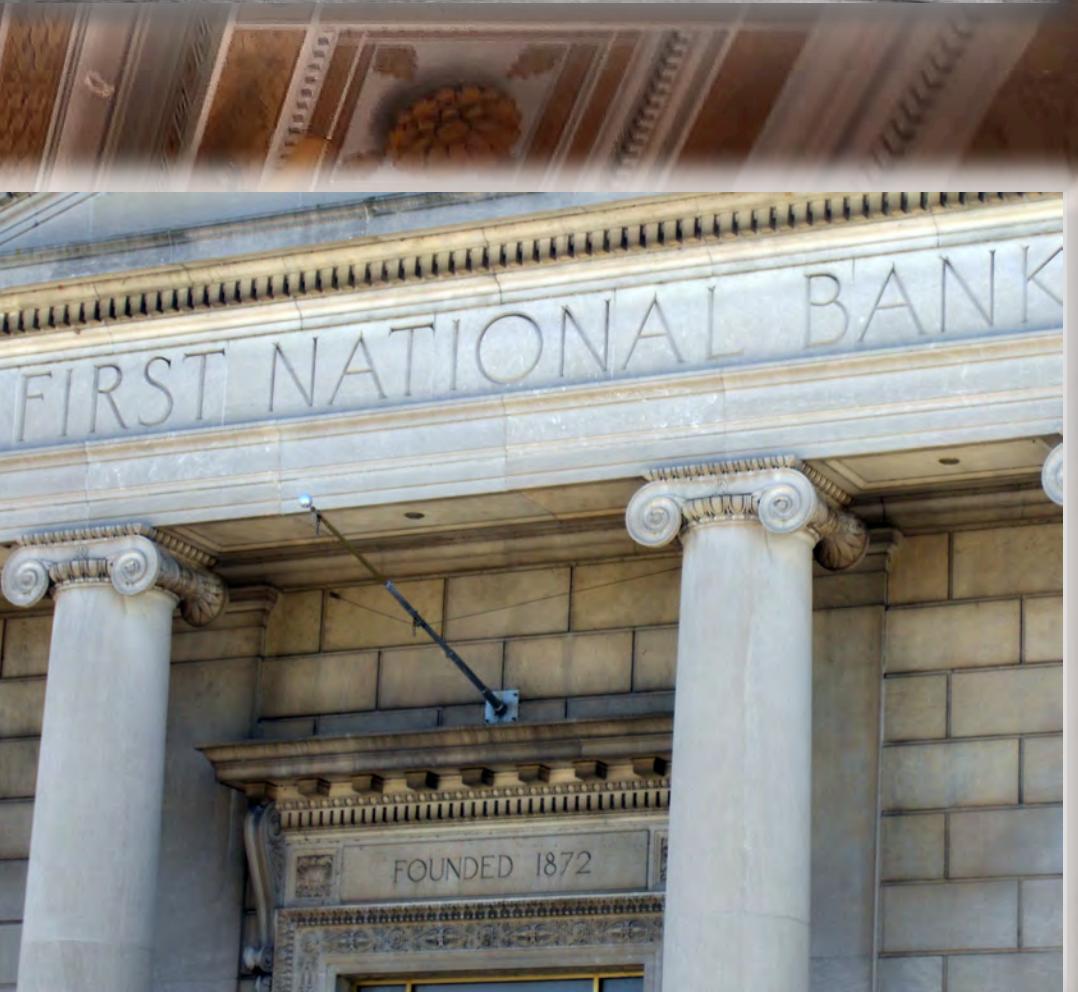
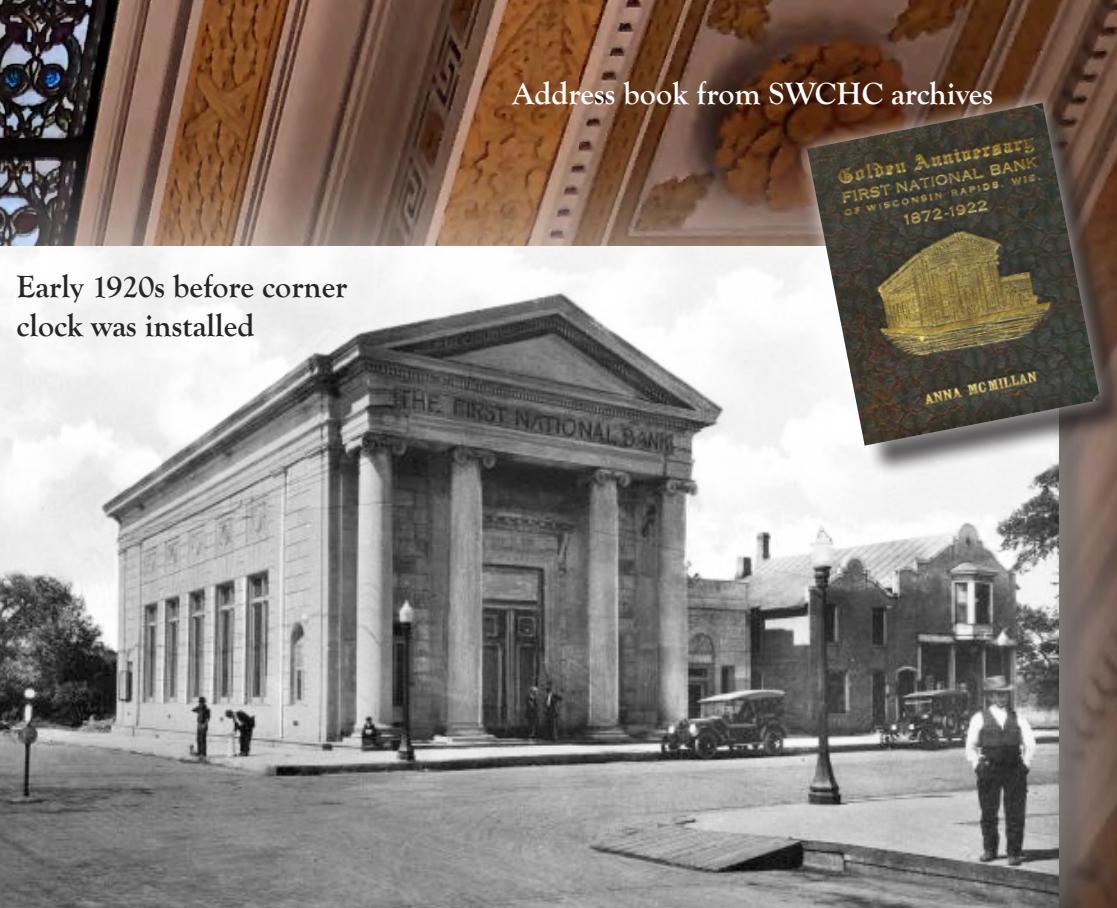
OPEN FOR BUSINESS—At 9 a.m. Friday, patrons of the First National Bank may again bank from their cars, but at new, ultra-modern windows. The photo above shows the newly-surfaced approach to the windows from 3rd Ave. S. Customers will exit onto Johnson St. after completing their transactions.

## Drive-In Windows Completed at Bank

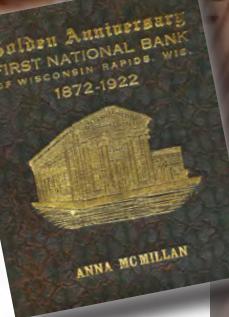
Fired Upon, Refugee Escapes to Freedom

BERLIN (AP) — East German border guards fired two shots at a

Ceiling photo  
{background}  
2024  
by UD



2007 photo by Terri Walker



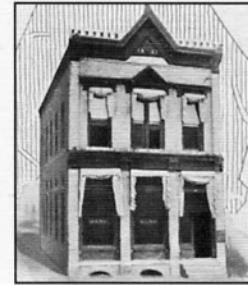
## Firststar Bank publication 1995

**History of Firststar Bank Wisconsin Rapids**

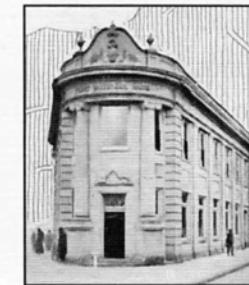
**1872** First National Bank was founded by J.D. Witter with a \$5,000 shipment of gold. The first bank in Wood County, it was located where the old Labor Temple building is, near the Jackson Street bridge.



1872



1888



1907

**1888** The bank of Grand Rapids was also founded by J.D. Witter, but on the west side of the river.

**1907** First National Bank moves to the flat iron building until 1921.

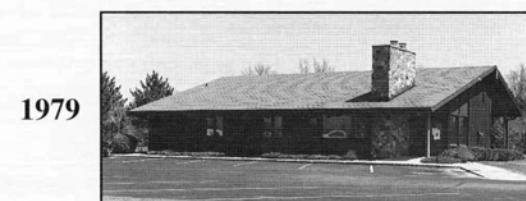


1921

**1921** Completed in 1921, the First National Bank of Wisconsin Rapids was born out of the merger of the First National Bank and the Bank of Grand Rapids.

*The First Wisconsin National Bank of Milwaukee sent a congratulatory bouquet to the bank for its grand opening celebration.*

**1979** The Adams County Office was built. Many residents will remember the mobile home that served as our branch office for six years.



1979

**1989** First National Bank is acquired by First Wisconsin (Their lead bank, First Wisconsin National Bank of Milwaukee).



1992

**1992** The 8th at Two Mile Office is completed on the former site of the Two Mile School.



1994 Junction City

**1992** First Wisconsin changes its name to Firststar.

**1994** Bank of Athens, Junction City and Marshfield offices join Firststar Wisconsin Rapids.

**1995** Marshfield moves to their new location, 1625 North Central Avenue.

## Memorabilia donated to SWCHC by U.S. Bank

**Borrowing money can be a beautiful experience.**

*That's why Jeanne Krans is the first person you meet in our loan department*



*Borrowing money is a beautiful thing. We make it so through the people who work in our installment loan department — the service they give — and the lending philosophy that we pursue in all our personal loan transactions. Your first introduction to a First Bank loan starts with Jeanne. She is the first person you meet as you enter our installment loan area. From that point on we work hard to keep the relationship just as beautiful. Jeanne is one of our good people working for you.*



**2002** Firststar merges with U.S. Bank.

**2024** U.S. Bank closes West Grand Avenue Branch

**1973 Ads**  
*Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*

**When it comes to loans, Tom Spranger is a "yes" man.**



*Tom likes to say yes and says it often to those who ask him for extra funds. He'll give his okay to your loan if you have a worthwhile purpose for borrowing. And best of all the loan you get from Tom is a loan you can live with. First Bank terms — they are the best. And a First Bank loan os —*



**Construction of the First National Bank** building began in 1920 and was completed in mid-1921. The land was owned by Mrs. Knapp, a sister of J.D. Witter, the founder of the Bank. His son, Isaac, was this bank's first president, and he oversaw its construction. (See the Bank's history on the reverse side.)

**Designed by Childs and Smith**, who also designed the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, it is of Greek-Doric style. Some of the features include Greek symbols on the east side exterior and the powerful ionic columns in front — weighing 42,000 pounds each. The north and east sides are Bedford limestone, the south and west are brick.

**Part of the single-story addition** to the west side of the building was constructed with the original bank. Designed as a "community" room, civic and other groups gathered here on a regular basis. The Wisconsin Rapids Chamber of Commerce even called it home during the '50s. If you look closely at the front, you'll see where the second part of the addition was added in the mid-70s.

**The interior's most dramatic feature** is by far the 40-foot high stained glass ceiling. A huge skylight covers two-thirds of the building's roof, allowing natural light to shine through. (Today, the center portion of the ceiling is illuminated with fluorescent lights.)

**The plaster rosettes on the ceiling** were cast on the floor, then raised and mounted in place. The ceiling fans were added in the early '80s.

**A.F. Billmeyer** was the general contractor. J.A. Staub did the original electrical work and Grand Rapids Plumbing the plumbing and steam heating system.

**The new south entrance** is located where the president's office was in 1921. Remnants of the fireplace that helped warm that office had to be removed during the recent construction. The lobby has changed many times to keep pace with the many changes in banking over the past seven decades.

The building that was the "First National Bank" hasn't been locally owned for 35 years. In 1989, it was sold to Firststar/First Wisconsin (Milwaukee) which had already maintained a trust department here for nine years.

When, in 1990, Firststar purchased the Two Mile School property on 8th Street, the future of the downtown branch was apparent, even before the onset of online banking and the diminution of the old shopping district.

That's happening all over the world.



Designed by Childs & Smith, Chicago, the new bank was said to fulfill a dream of the deceased founder, J.D. Witter, bank president George Mead's father-in-law. Architect W.J. Smith visited Rapids in August 1920, no doubt conferring with A.F. Billmeyer (a member of the Jeffrey family profiled in the previous issue), who was named general contractor of what was predicted to be one of the finest such edifices outside Milwaukee.

For the bank's opening in October 1921, officers and their wives welcomed visitors with candy for the women, toys for the children and "smokes" for the men.

Credit to U.S. Bank for donating several boxes of historical materials to SWCHC archives, including the photo at left, and for preserving a landmark that represents the dignity and beauty of the increasingly dim and distant past.

Who's the mystery man on this bill? Don't ask a banker!



## A Personal Check

by Uncle Dave

To me, it sucks—the closing of the bank in May 2024. The awesome edifice was conveniently located on my route along blessedly peaceful “downtown” streets and featured a mostly-empty parking lot, a scenic interior and few customers, mostly old-timers like me. Sometimes, my personal financial guru, history buff Perry Worzella, met me under the historic skylight to discuss volatility in the markets and the need to stay the course.

Though my dad had introduced me to First National some three score and ten years ago, I had in the 1980s flirted with the East Side Wood County bank because it wrote the checks for the *Daily Tribune*. But its tellers kept asking for my name and identification. When I took umbrage at a similar slight at First National, bank officer and Sand Hill homeboy Dave Hell handed me a check for \$5 as means of atonement. You just don’t treat the City Historian like the town drunk.

I don’t blame U.S. Bank for closing an increasingly lonesome location. It’s clearly the fault of my wife and her online banking. It’s probably your fault too. Not to mention whoever is responsible for clearing out most of the buildings in the vicinity. Once standing proudly as one of the four corners of a frenetic shopping district, along with Johnson Hill, Mead-Witter Block and Church’s drugs, the “Downtown Branch” now looks like a First National Monument.



Bank officers, Bernard Brazeau, Harry Walker, Henry Demitz at First National Bank about 1952. Walker died, along with three other Rapids businessman, in a 1954 plane crash.

Bernard Brazeau's affable son, Bill, at right, very nicely met with me when I was an impecunious journalist trying to refinance a mortgage. No one else would give me a loan and Bill had the good sense not to do it either.

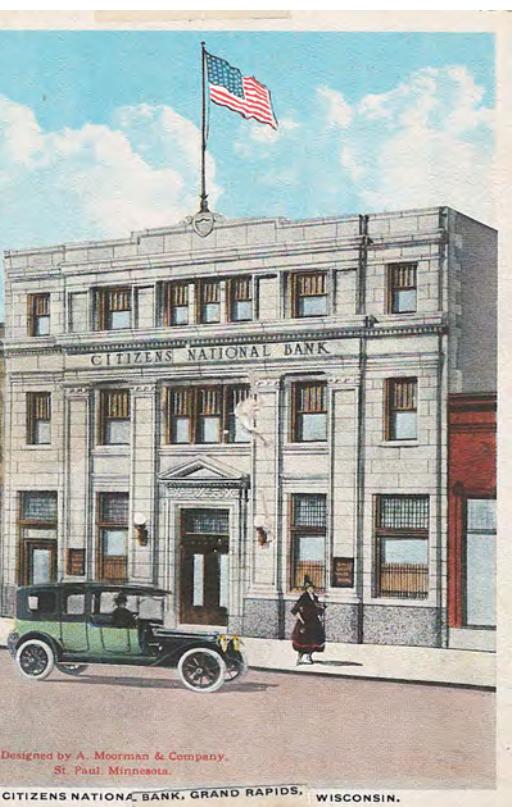


## ARTIFACTS

See page 15 for answer.



## ARTIFACTS



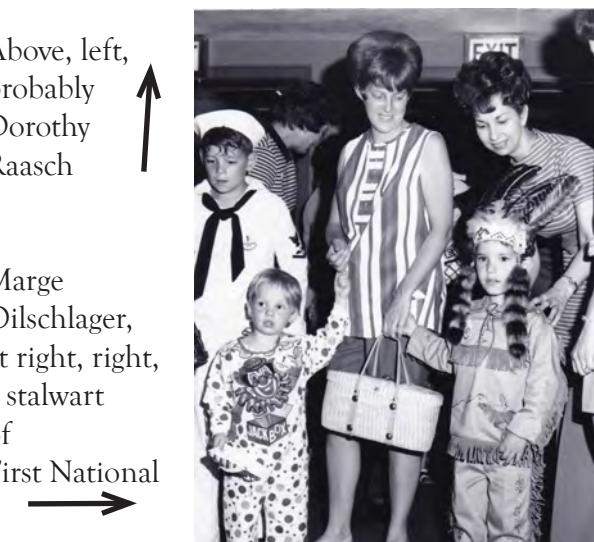
## Undercover Bank



Wisconsin Theatre, West Grand Avenue



Above, left,  
probably  
Dorothy  
Raasch



Marge  
Oilschlager,  
at right, right,  
a stalwart  
of  
First National



First National Junior Bankers at the Wisconsin Theatre,  
former Citizens National Bank, dissolved in the Depression

## Bank People!



Above: First National Bank: Wendell Miscoll's retirement party, Dec. 29, 1969

Wendell J. Miscoll, James P. Kauth, Darwin A. Blanke, John Hosvedt, Raymond L. Anderson, Janet Draxler, Leo Kleppin, Kay Tomskey, Lois VerVoort, Larry Egland, Sharon Wein, Jean Bohn, Dorothy Raasch, Patrick Daly, Carol Piltz, Don Worzella, Kay Collins, Judy Ruiter, Shirley Wussow, Judy Bushman, Jeanne Jinkerson, Susan Dankmyer, Diane Skibba, Harry J. Ciaciura, Mary Weber, Mary Murray, Kathleen Steinke, Kay Snyder, Bernadette Gerum, Janet Fuller, Ann M. Groch, Sandy O'Keefe, Peggy Walton, Margie Oilschlager, Mary Alice Wefel, Alfred C. Sweet



Circa 1957



BACK ROW: DONA ARNDT, LOIS PETERSON, MARY HORN, EDNA ARMAGOST, ART HUSTON, BETTY ARNDT, LEONARD OLSON, BIA TIMM, JOHN HOSTVEDT, DAWN WITT, ANN GROCH, ROSEMARY HUSER & YVONNE VOIT.  
FRONT ROW: DAR BLANKE, PAT BENGERT, WARD JOHNSON, HENTY DEMITZ, SANDY ERICKSON, BERNADETTE GERUM, ED BRENNER & WENDELL MISCOLL.

1991

First National Bank officers, Jeff Hoffman, Pat Daly, Dave Hell, Dave Hagen; seated, Al Sweet, Harry Caciura

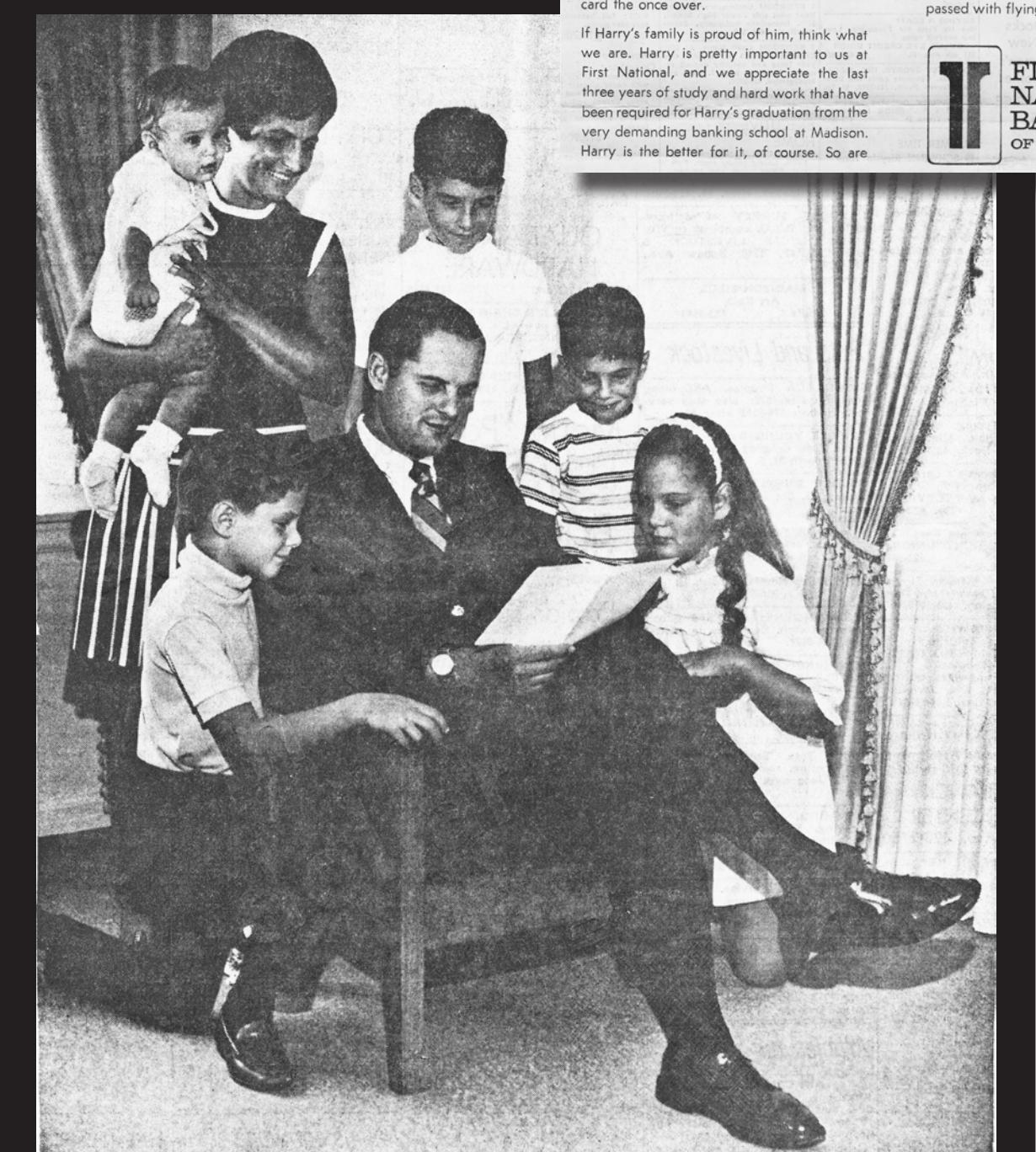


**Our name's changed,  
but it's still us**

May 8, 2002



Standing, Left to Right: Jill Degler, Lori Litka, Aaron Anderson, David Hell, Cary Koerten, Karen Kuehner, Andrew Johnson  
Sitting, Left to Right: Amy Gost, Gail McAllister, Holly Malueg, Lisa Grafe



1970 Daily Tribune bank ad

## Harry Ciaciura

**Did you pass, Dad?**

We're happy to say he did. But Harry Ciaciura's family switched the scene on him when he returned from his third and final year of study at the School of Banking, University of Wisconsin. The Ciaciura household\* gathered around to give Dad's report card the once over.

If Harry's family is proud of him, think what we are. Harry is pretty important to us at First National, and we appreciate the last three years of study and hard work that have been required for Harry's graduation from the very demanding banking school at Madison. Harry is the better for it, of course. So are we, and so are you people who rely on Harry for help on banking matters. He is a better banker today because of this effort and study on his part. His report card proves it. Ask him the next time you're in the bank to let you check his marks for proof that he passed with flying colors.

**FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF WISCONSIN RAPIDS**

2024 Interview and Photo by UD

## Trust Liaison Man

Three things about Harry: his name is pronounced Sy-cure-ah; he admits to looking somewhat like Anthony Hopkins; and they say, "If you want to know about the bank, you need to talk to Harry Ciaciura."

Ciaciura started at Harris Bank, Chicago, and moved on to First National Bank of Kenosha, his wife's home town. Later, he was told, "They're looking for somebody with your background in Wisconsin Rapids." So he drove up for an interview.

"It was a two lane all the way. We made a turn on to Main Street, saw the Mead Inn and we said, this is quite a place.

"We were there for several days. They treated us royally. And boy, I tell you, in those days, Main Street was used to a lot of traffic flow.

"They interviewed us, offered me the job and I took it on June 6th of '66. Dar [Darwin] Blanke was the president and Barney Brazeau was on the board. Stanton Mead had a big ownership in the bank.

"One time I was sitting at my desk, on the phone, when Stanton came in. So I said to the person on the phone, "I'll talk to you later. I've got an important customer over here."

"That guy got top shelf all the time. He was a good man, a funny guy. I said, 'Stan, let me buy a drink.'

"He said, 'No, because then I have to buy you a drink.'

"But I tell you what, contrary to that, he was one of those guys that, if something wasn't taken care of, he would say to Neil Atwood [of Consolidated Papers], 'Would you take care of that?'"



Some years after his 1966 arrival, First National Bank president Dar Blanke named Harry trust liaison officer, "between the customer and our services."

"It was a 1-2 combination. We developed a program whereby we would invite the wealthy people I knew and Phil Dunmeyer, our trust officer, and I, would put on a seminar. More often than not, the people that attended said they would like to have a visit with me and Phil.

"Phil was a pilot. He would fly in from Milwaukee and I would say, okay, so you got five meetings. I would sit in if the client wanted. They said, 'We know you, but we don't know him.'

"The bank was very friendly. It took care of our customers very nicely. We had all kinds of promotions going on over there during the cranberry fest. We would have Halloween

parties, the "dress a dolls," Andy and Annie Cranberry, Junior Bankers.

"It was orchestrated pretty much by Mary Alice Wefel, Skip's mother. Oh, she was a goer.

"Marge Oilschlager also was very much part of the operation. She had a pretty good job. She and Loretta Schoechert. Barney Brazeau, of course, was the major owner when I came, and Bill was the son. Bill and I are very close. As a matter of fact, I'll be with Bill tonight."

Bank friendships lasted. "Dar Blanke said, 'Harry, I want to take you and Virge out for lunch.'

"So we had a nice visit. We covered a lot of things that were part of our life. And then about two weeks after that [2011], he passed away."

Ciaciura cont.

## Bank Notes

## Doorway without a Door

UD: It was one of the outlandish memories I have been trying to confirm. Harry said, "Yes, it was always open and you would never feel the cold or the heat from outside. The air was running to the bottom and you would walk right through it."



1965

## Tunnel

"Oh, yes, there was a tunnel that went all the way to the drive-up which was, in fact, one of the first drive-up windows. That was a big operation. We had our teller windows out there. We had to dynamite through the granite to put it in."



2007 photos  
by bank  
employee  
Terri Walker

## Prospects

Harry Ciaciura: "That building could be converted like they did with a big bank in Chicago. They turned it into stores and operations. And they can do the same thing with this one. But they may tear it down." *Would that bother you if they tore it down?* "Absolutely, that was so much a part of my life."



## Uncle Dave's \$50 Question

UD: "When I go to the First National Bank I like to ask the teller whose picture is on the \$50 bill. They never get it right. Do you know who it is?"

HC: "No! I think it's, uh uh, well, is it Wilson?"

UD: "Yesterday I asked somebody out on the 8th Street branch. She didn't know and didn't care."

"The only person who has got it right was last year, downtown, Jeremy Kauffman. No wonder. He happens to be the son of a *Tribune* reporter, Dave Kauffman. I used to play tennis with him."

## Fallout Shelter/1971 Lunchroom



2007 photos  
by bank  
employee  
Terri Walker

UD: In 1961, then bank president B.C. Brazeau told the *Tribune* that the bank was constructing what might be the first employee-family shelter to be operated by a business firm. It would have water, food and medical supplies, a generator and chemical toilets—created by enlarging the basement under the drive-in.

Harry: "And in fact, they had to have that thing stocked because they were scared of the atomic bomb. They had all kinds of food and all kinds of stuff."



2007

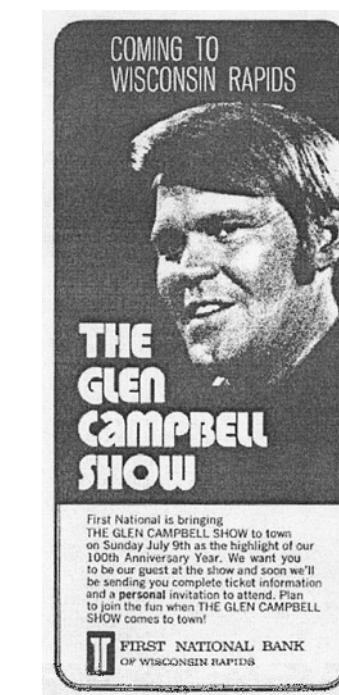
Bill Brazeau, vice president 1984-91, told the *Tribune* in the anniversary year of 2007 that the downtown bank had been the hub of activity on Fridays when lines of mill workers stretched out the front door as they waited to cash paychecks and the drive-up had to be closed to prevent cars from blocking the streets. Times had changed, said David Hell, bank president, with fewer paychecks deposited in person, automated teller machines, electronic deposit and Internet banking that had reduced staff downtown from about 60 to 15.



Photographer  
Terri Walker  
(Haase), left,  
with Darla Gotz



Annie & Andy  
Cranberry



In conjunction with its 1972 centennial, the First National Bank sponsored a free concert at Witter Field, featuring entertainer Glen Campbell—and also funded a history video by Paul Gross, beginning an invaluable series that continued into the 21st Century.

And the bank paid for our fireworks!

## Wisconsin Rapids Film Sponsored by Local Bank

The premier showing of an original movie on the early history of Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., was held recently for the staff of the First National Bank in that city, sponsors of the film; members of the South Wood County Historical Corp., and directors of McMillan Memorial Library, in the latter's Fine Arts Center.

First National Bank sponsored the picture as a highlight of its 100th anniversary celebration.

The half-hour film, "Wisconsin Rapids Then and Now — 100 Years," covers the history of Grand Rapids, as the city was known at that time, from the middle 1800s to the present, with emphasis on the early days of the downtown area. It was produced by Paul R. Gross and narrated by William L. Nobles, both of Wisconsin Rapids.

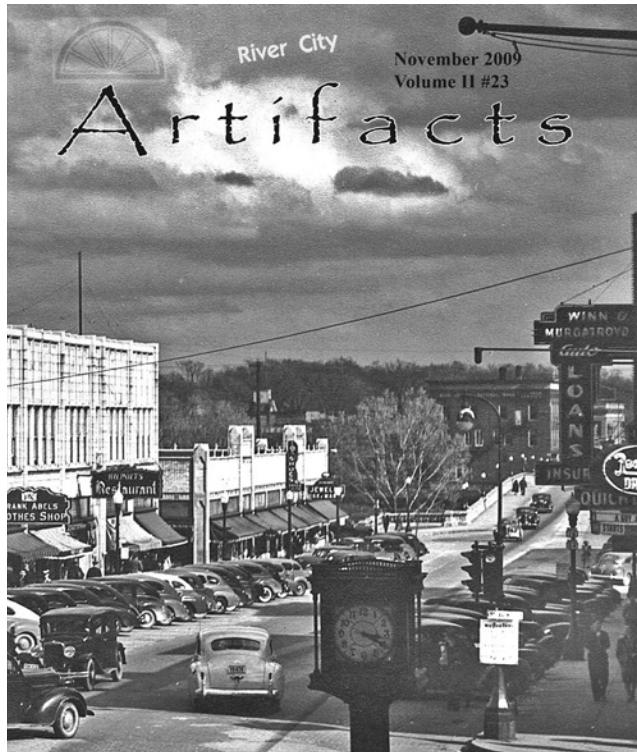


Early 1970s  
“Dress a Doll”  
entries shown

## The Clock



1927



**C**over: Grand Avenue, 1940s (Auril Harding). Inside: Kellogg Connection by Lori Brost, 2-3; Phil, 3; Bargain by Joan Haas, 4-5; Bean Factory by LuVerne Conway, 6-7; Homesteading by Gene Johnson, 8-10; Two Maestros by Earle Garber, 11-13; Stub & Me by Joe Jackan, 14-15; Oak Street photo, 16-17; Robinson Park by Ed Severson, 18-19; Murgatroyd's Way by Auril Harding, 20-31; Uncle Dave, 32.

## Load of Eggs Scrambled When Automobiles Crash

A shower of eggs which broke with a bomb-shell effect when they struck the pavement, spreading their golden yellows in circular blotches all over the street, was the instantaneous result of a collision between a Ford coupe owned by Stanley Radtke of Sigel and the big Stevens Point passenger bus about noon today at the intersection of Third and Grand avenues.

### Meet at Intersection

Mr. Radtke, whose coupe has a truck body attached to the rear, had just started from the arterial on Third avenue and was about half way across the intersection when the bus, going west on Grand, struck the Ford amidships, caving in the side, smashing a rear wheel, and sending a plentiful collection of hen fruit in all directions. The eggs had been reposing in two large and two

small crates in the truck body, along with a veal carcass which Radtke had brought to market this morning.

The deceased calf also described an arc through the air at the time of impact and nestled down among the broken eggs. The force of the collision turned the Ford half way around and swung it against the post which supports the big clock in front of the First National bank.

### Bus Not Damaged

Several dozen of the eggs were smashed in the accident, and the interior of Mr. Radtke's coupe was well showered with them, but the crate withstood the test well and most of the contents were found to be in good condition after an inventory had been taken. No damage

1926

We were the interested observer last evening of something that brought a lump into our throat and made us feel awfully sorry for a certain poor citizen of our village. This poor fellow who had the appearances of being German by birth but Scotch by absorption was standing on the corner dropping pennies in the mail box and looking up at the First National bank clock to see how much he weighed. Now for this simple display of ignorance in regards the ways of the city he was arrested. That's what we call an outrage. Maybe business was rather slow for the police department, but is that any reason why they should put a perfectly innocent man in the hoosegow all night and maybe keep his wife awake carrying the rolling pin until the wee small hours of the morning awaiting his return? It will undoubtedly prove the undoing of the person in question for once a man has served a jail sentence it's awfully hard to get back on the "straight and narrow" again.

2009 publication, photo 1940+



McClintock street clock offered for sale in 2024



### First National Bank Clock Finds New Home

By Alison Bruener  
SWCHC Staff

Since late June, you may have noticed a significant addition to the Museum grounds at 540 3rd St. S.

The four-sided McClintock street clock was installed at the First National Bank in 1925-26 and stands about 12 feet tall. Initially facing Grand Avenue, it was later moved to the 3rd Avenue side, following numerous run-ins with trucks rounding the intersection.

The clock stayed with the bank until 2000 when then-owner Firststar wanted to preserve the clock in a "place where it would be safe." A moving committee was organized that included Mayor "Bud" Verjinsky, Dave Hell (President of Firststar Bank), Joe Ostrum (building maintenance manager for the bank), Paul Gross (local historian and jeweler), and Phil Brown (South Wood County Historical Museum).

The committee moved the clock to a small park on the corner of East Grand Avenue and Lincoln Street, where it stood until this year.

At the Grand Avenue location, Paul Gross replaced the motor, fashioned a cam device to move the minute hand, and stored three extra motors in the clock case. He also repaired the face dials and rewired the inner mechanism.

In recent years, the clock began to struggle to maintain time. This summer, with the assistance of Nieman's Towing & Recovery Inc., Bushman Masonry & Concrete, E-Con Electric, Inc., and individuals Robert Brown, George Collar, and Phil Brown, the First National Bank clock is up and will soon be keeping time.

It feels right—having a piece of the former "Witter Bank" prominently displayed at the South Wood County Historical Museum, the former home of the Witter family.



Moving the clock: February 1970



August 2024: videographer Paul Gross and SWCHC vice president Phil Brown with newly installed time-piece at the Museum. Photo by Alison Bruener



Photo from 1929 Milton college yearbook saw a lot of use in 1930.



MISS VIRGINIA WHITTLESEY  
Miss Virginia Whittlesey, central Wisconsin's premier girl pilot, will perform with the Nepco air circus at the Stevens Point airport August 10. She will do practically every known aviation acrobatic in a Fairchild training plane. Miss Whittlesey has nearly 200 hours of flying time in and will soon take out a transport license. She lives in Port Edwards and was trained in the Nepco school.

## Virginia Whittlesey One of Few Women Transport Pilots

Everyone knows of Amelia Earhardt and her flying prowess, but few, even in this community in which she has grown to womanhood, are informed of the fact that the second woman pilot in the United States to be given a flying rating on all types of airplanes up to 7,000 pounds capacity was Virginia Whittlesey, of Port Edwards, graduate of the Nepco School of Flying. Miss Earhardt was the first.

Miss Whittlesey started her aviation training at the local school in August 1929, and proved wonderfully cool headed and quick to learn. She went to St. Petersburg that fall, and continued her training at the Nepco School of Flying which was temporarily established there. When she was ready to take her transport pilot's examination she passed with an average grade of 95, which is unusually good.

Immediately following her graduation, Miss Whittlesey accepted a position with the Curtiss-Wright Exhibition group, which while it was in existence was said to have



been the world's greatest troupe of exhibition flyers. After she had been with this organization three weeks, the company dissolved and she returned to her home. She is now in the employ of the Nepco Tri-City Flying Service as an instructor, and has also been doing considerable cross-country flying.



MISS VIRGINIA WHITTLESEY  
GIRL FLYER GETS HIGHEST RATING

VIRGINIA WHITTLESEY OF PORT EDWARDS PASSES EXAMINATION FOR TRANSPORT LICENSE.

Port Edwards today claimed the only girl transport pilot in Wisconsin and the fifteenth girl in the United States to hold a transport license, the highest rating given airplane pilots by the United States department of commerce.

The girl who has attained this high mark in aviation is Miss Virginia Whittlesey, who has thrilled central Wisconsin with acrobatic flying on various occasions and who has never hesitated to match her skill with that of the opposite sex.

### Given High Grades

Miss Whittlesey received exceptionally high grades in her written tests and her flight tests at the Nepco Tri-City airport yesterday when she was put through the paces by Inspector O. W. Young of the aeronautics branch of the department of commerce. She took the tests after having had 200 hours of instruction in the Nepco School of Flying.

Tom Nash, this city, and F. H. Bassett, Minocqua, other graduates of the Nepco flying courses, successfully passed the required tests and were awarded the transport or highest pilots' license which permits them to carry mail, freight, passengers and work at any phase of commercial aviation. Wilbur Morgan, New York, and Kenneth O. Keiper, Green Bay, were awarded a limited commercial and private pilots' license respectively. Morgan's license called for 50 hours of instruction while Keiper's called for only 25 hours. Both of them received their instruction in the local school.

Wants Sales Work  
Miss Whittlesey, when asked about her plans for the future, said she would go south for a short vacation before accepting a position. When asked what branch of commercial aviation she desired to enter she stated that she preferred sales work which would give her an opportunity for considerable cross country flying.

ector Young and Supervising Inspector George Vest of the Chicago division flew to this city from Milwaukee in a Stinson Junior cabin and were conducting tests early morning until late in the day and then continued this in giving the ratings to those who had taken transport examinations.

Frank Muth, La Crosse, flying a Caco 10 plane, took the transport test and was awarded a license. His ship and Bud Heath, Fond du Lac, flying a Pheasant, was awarded a private license by the inspectors here yesterday. Jere Witt, this city, had the license to his renewed for another year.

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Memorials may be designated to St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Waupaca.

"One of the school's training planes. The person standing alongside of the plane might be Virginia Whittlesey, the first woman to obtain a flight license from the school and possibly first in the state."

—Marshall Buehler



## Madison Guest Shares Honor With Earhardt

Virginia Whittlesey, Pilot, Spending Winter with Miss Fitch Here

"WELL I was going to teach school, but the idea of having to stand up in front of those children frightened me so that I decided to take up flying, laughingly remarked Miss Virginia Whittlesey, who shares the honor with Amelia Earhardt of being the only two women in the United States to be given a flying rating on all types of airplanes up to 7,000 pounds capacity.

Miss Whittlesey lives in Port Edwards, but is spending the winter with her aunt Miss Caroline Fitch, 406 N. Henry st.

After obtaining her private operator license within two months, Miss Whittlesey, went to St. Petersburg and attended the Nepco school of flying, now located at Wisconsin Rapids, and after a year's time passed her transport pilot's examination with the average of 95 which is unusually good.

Immediately following her graduation, Miss Whittlesey, accepted a position with the Curtiss-Wright Exhibition group which during its existence was said to be the world's greatest troupe of exhibition flyers. She has done considerable cross-country flying in northern Michigan, Iowa, and Minnesota.

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MISS VIRGINIA WHITTLESEY and Amelia Earhardt are the only two women in the United States given a flying rating on all types of airplanes up to 7,000 pounds capacity. Miss Whittlesey is spending the winter as the guest of an aunt, Miss Caroline Fitch, 406 N. Henry st.



ONLY 3 D

The Capital Times, Madison, Wis. 1930

FIFTY YEARS AGO — 1930  
Virginia Whittlesey, Port Edwards, is the first Wisconsin woman and the 15th in the United States to win the U.S. Department of Commerce transport pilot's license. She plans to enter airplane sales work.

La Crosse Tribune, 1980

## Virginia Whittlesey

Virginia Whittlesey, 74, Waupaca, formerly of Port Edwards, died Wednesday.

A memorial service was held today at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Waupaca.

Mrs. Whittlesey was born March 1, 1905 at Cranmoor, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Whittlesey. She lived in Port Edwards as a youngster, and was active in aviation during the 1930s.

Memorials may be designated to St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Waupaca.

1979

Continued from previous issue

## More Former Industries

### Grand Rapids Brewing Co.

The first brewer here was Nicholas Schmitt, a native of Germany, who arrived in 1859. In 1880, his brewery at what is now Oliver Street and First Street N. was purchased by Andrew Lutz of the Stevens Point brewery, who turned it over to his much-younger brothers, Jacob and David.

In 1891, the structure was destroyed by fire, to be rebuilt in 1893 as Twin City Brewing Co. when the Lutzes assimilated the unsuccessful Frank Stahl and Richard Scheibe brewery at the same location—only to have the property leveled by another fire in 1895. In 1932, the adjacent Daly ice house was razed, leaving a stone wall that was recognized as a relic of one of the old breweries.

In 1905, the Grand Rapids Brewing Co. began operation in an impressive new structure under Jacob Lutz and Henry A. Sampson, continuing until the Volstead Act and Prohibition in 1920.

Even after Prohibition, an affiliated company continued to produce and bottle non-alcoholic beverages. It was purchased by George Gibson in 1937 and

Recollection Wisconsin



## ARTIFACTS

sold by him in 1961 to Beverage Bottlers, Inc. In 1988, General Bottlers purchased the company and moved to Jefferson Street. The Love Street location maintained a recycling center until 1998.

### Sampson Canning Co.

After laws against the sale of alcoholic beverages, brewer Jake Lutz and Frank Rourke started a cannery in the former brewery—which in 1922 came into the possession of Henry A. Sampson Sr. and Jr. The company under Henry Sampson's sons Henry “Ray” and Gerald “Jim” closed in 1971.

In 1985, the building was bought by Northern Steel Castings to produce equipment used in mining, construction, railroad hydraulics, and oil fields.

In 2005, a fire engulfed much of the building. The company rebuilt, though it would shut down its Wisconsin Rapids operations in June 2017.

See *River City Memoirs* (#1) for a history of Grand Rapids Brewing Co. and *Fat Memoirs* (#4) for photos of the Grand Rapids Brewery, also *Artifacts* 63 for the Lutz family of brewers.

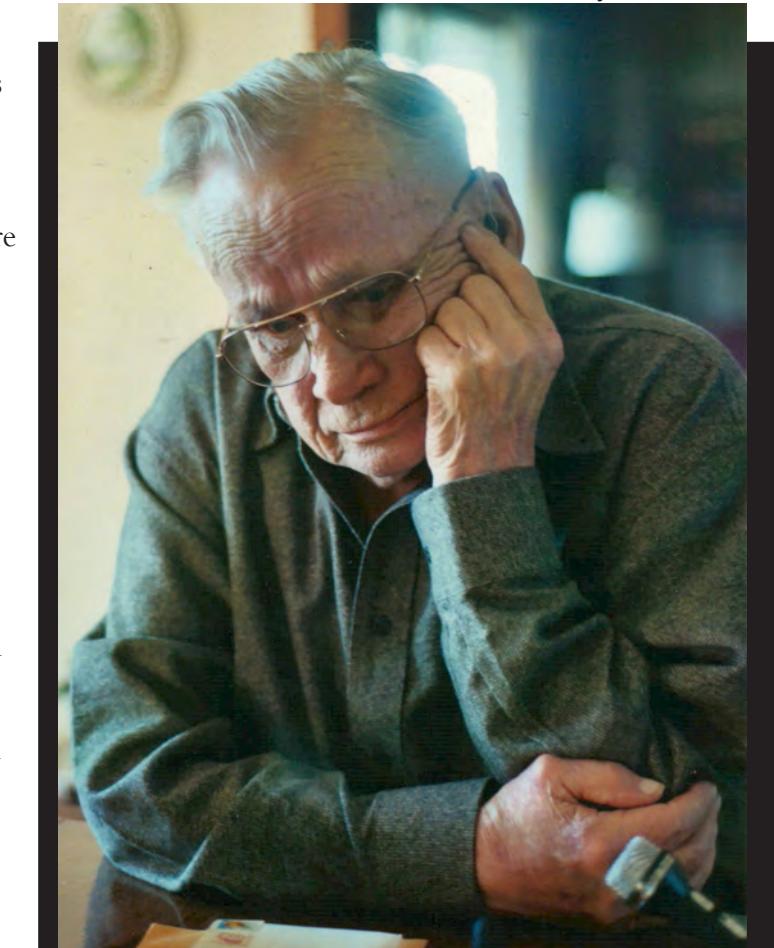
2005 by UD

## ARTIFACTS

### Jim 1912-2003

*Interview with Uncle Dave*  
Nov. 23, 2002  
Beaver Dam, Wis.

Photo by UD



Gerald "Jim" Sampson, 2002

Accompanied by his stepson (my classmate) Uncle Rob Gringle, I met in 2002 with Jim Sampson, who partnered with brother Ray to run the Sampson Canning Co. on north First Street. That interview is published here for the first time.

“Sampson’s” was operated in our time by Henry “Ray” Sampson (*Artifacts* #1, May 2004) and Gerald “Jim” Sampson, whose words, spoken not long before his 2003 death, are presented here.

Jim was born in 1912 to Ida Marie Halvorsen Sampson [1883-1961], formerly of Port Edwards and Henry Ahira Sampson Jr. [1882-1926].

### Ahira

Henry’s father and Jim’s great-grandfather was Ahira B. Sampson [1813-1885], a New York state native who attended Point Bluff College north of Wisconsin Dells, where he met Pennsylvania native Jane Teel. They married in 1836, the year Wisconsin became a territory.

The Sampsons lived neat the Whitney Rapids sawmill across the Wisconsin river from what is now Nekoosa. There was held the first wedding in newly-created Wood County—of George Kline to Maria Whitney.

In 1840, the Sampsons moved to Rapids, where they ran a “way station” on the site of the later Labor Temple, a two-room first-in-town “hotel.”

### Henry Sr.

Ahira’s son, who was Jim’s grandfather, Henry Sampson Sr. [1842-1935] is considered the first white child born in the county, at Whitney Rapids.

Henry Sr. joined local eminences such John Daly in the logging company of Daly & Sampson; John Farrish in the E.W. Ellis Lumber Co.; and J.D. Witter (of the First National Bank), with whom he and Daly founded Oberbeck Manufacturing Co., later Ah-dawagam Paper Products, profiled in *Artifacts* 71.



Henry Sampson Jr. and others at "Huntington's"

In Rapids, said Jim, Sampson Street got its name from his grandfather, who owned property that included what is now the Griffith nursery.

#### Henry Jr.

Henry Jr., Jim's dad, had been a bookkeeper and foreman at the Oberbeck company. "When the furniture factory went down, my dad was hired by [George] Mead to run the Biron mill but his dad talked him into going into the canning factory. My granddad, for some reason, never got along with George Mead. He had an interest in Consolidated but he pulled out and became owner and manager of Sampson Canning Co.

"The Krauses started the canning factory," said Jim. "They were related to the Lutes from the brewery. Granddad got it on the mortgage."

Henry Sr. was also secretary and treasurer of Sampson-Mullen Clothing Co. and a director of First National Bank.

In 1926, Henry Jr. died at 42 of typhoid fever in the family homestead where he was born. Jim was 14 years of age.

#### Gerald James "Jim"

For Jim, all those family business connections didn't always do much good.

"Was my family well to do? When I was in high school it seemed everything went to hell. Remember

[Ralph] Wiltrot? When he came to town [1923], he worked at Preway.

"Preway was hard up, couldn't get any money and they had a payroll coming up. I remember Fritsinger, Jack—his dad got my granddad to lend Preway \$10,000 to meet their payroll. The family had almost a million dollars of stock in there when he [Wiltrot, 1952?] went out.

"At Sampson's, we had our own problems. We bought cans on credit from Continental Can Co., Chicago. Quite a debt going into the canning season. It happened every year. After harvest we were able to pay it off.

"During the Depression, it was hard to get money and we didn't run the factory. We were having trouble with Taylor and Demitz at the First National and with the First National, Milwaukee.

"Like everybody else, I was looking for work and finally got a job at Preway on the assembly line and as a spot welder, making stoves for Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward. I think I started in '34.

#### Beans

"It was about 1937 when Sampson's started up again and that's when I went steady. All inside work. July, August, September, canning beans. I ran the snipper room, worked in the warehouse and on the cutters, pushed crates, fired the boilers.



Howe High School football, Henry Sampson Jr., at center. In the early 1930s, Jim was also a football standout at Rapids high school, then Lincoln.



Bean season at Sampson's

"My brother Harold, two years older, also came to work there, along with Jake Krause, Willy Farrell, Oligneys, Tony Hintz, Abe Gray. I made 35 cents an hour working 18-19 hours a day, 7 o'clock until midnight. People like myself didn't get overtime.

"Ray was the boss of the outfit. I had stock. Still have it.

"Of the brothers and sisters in the business, Janet was dead, so there was five of us: Ray [1907-2001], Harold [1910-1999], myself [1912-2003], Ralph [1916-1990] and Marjorie Jane [Peters 1918-2016].

"Ray was the salesman, sold beans in cans to A&P, Wood County grocery company, Libby's, Fairway in Minnesota. Our labels said 'Heart of Wisconsin' or, most often, they furnished labels.

#### Golden Sands

"In the '30s, we got the beans around Rudolph, Stevens Point, Wausau. They were picked by hand.

"During the war era, we were the first ones to develop the Plainfield area through irrigation. You didn't have to fight the other canners then.

"In '44, somewhere around there, we started the peas. Usually, different farmers grew the peas than grew the beans. First it was Vesper and Arpin area. Then we went out to Plover. We got started out there with Hatch Berard and his brother-in-law from Point.

"Hatch was selling insurance in Point and he started in on potatoes. Then the potato market was kind

of down, so he went to beans. They started calling it the Golden Sands.

"I had been working at Sampson when I was drafted in 1942. I had 40 months in the service, in the states most of the time, where I was a searchlight electrician. When I was in Europe, I was everything.

#### Back Home

"I came home in April 1946, back to Sampson. They were already canning peas. When they shut the plant down in 1971, I was superintendent.

"After the peas was the bean season. I was in charge of the factory, machinery, help.

"We ran two shifts. We used to have about 45 women on the shift. They worked on the snippers and the fillers. We had quite a few men working, and boys. Peas maybe last six weeks, beans last until it froze up."

#### Closing Up

"The company closed up in 1971. Not because of the DNR. Ray wanted to close it and the rest of them had stock but they didn't care about it. I was the only one that still wanted to work on it in the factory. We just closed it up. Five or six years later, we got what we sold the building for.

"I wanted to work so I came to Beatrice Foods at Clyman, 15 miles south of Beaver Dam.

#### Jim's River City

"I like to remember about Rapids, had a lot of good times. Don't go there much any more. There's nobody named Sampson in Rapids. One of the pioneer families—all gone.

#### Homestead

"We owned half of the property on Market Street. The main part of the old courthouse was on Baker. From Baker to Saratoga, we owned 2/3 of that land there back of the courthouse.

"The house was sitting in the center. We had a great big barn.

"They took pieces out of the old house. There's two of them moved up on 5<sup>th</sup> Street toward the high school. By Ebsen's Greenhouse on Saratoga and 5<sup>th</sup> there's two houses there, then there's two more, those would be from the Sampson house. Where the rest went, I don't remember."

**Kids**

“Ray Burchell, Smith, Hershlebs, Scott, Don Farish [profiled in a previous *Artifacts*]. He lived where the Episcopal Church is. That was their homestead. Don is a couple years older. He was Harold’s pal, they’re all pals, all the kids.

- “We used to go up to the pool up there on First Street. We’d go in one end nude and the people swimming would leave

- “On Halloween, we used to try to tip a few [outhouses] over.

- “What we used to like to do is take a tire and put a rope on it, throw it out. A car would stop, ‘Oh I’m going to get a tire.’ We’d pull it and run.

- “Where that creek comes out before you get to Biron, Quinzel’s Creek, toward the island, on Thanksgiving Day [1925]—Ray Burchell, Tootie [Harold] Burchell, Russell Smith, my brother, Harold and I, were going to skate up to Biron, to race to the end of the island up there.

“But Tootie went through the ice. Ray, Harold and myself got out but we had a hard time getting Smith off the island. He was afraid to go back. We finally shoved him off.

- “By the hospital on the river, we used to go down there and shoot rats at the dump. Used to hunt rabbits up on Sand Hill with a shotgun or a .22.

- The old cemetery by Irving school, we used to cut through it. It was all brush, just a path through it. They cleaned it up during the Depression and moved the graves over by where the present cemetery is.

**Market Square**

“On the Market Square by the courthouse, farmers came in and put their horses there. In the center of it was a horse trough. It used to get icy around it. They didn’t have snowplows then and very few cars. There was kind of a brick ice over the pavement from the horses.

- “Kids used to get together: the Burchells and the Hershlebs, the Gaulkes, Ticknors, Smith, to go down and play hockey in the winter.

- “We used to fly kites there. One time, I was watching a kite I was flying and ran into the horse trough and got a black eye.

- “There was music in the courthouse yard. They used to have carnivals come in there in the summer. One time, I was going to the store for my mother, walking close to a booth and a damn monkey came out and bit me.

**Witter Farm**

“My mother’s family had a house on Second Street on the river below the Elks, maybe a rooming house. They used to keep their cow in Witter’s pasture, right up off Third Street. Kids in the neighborhood played up there a lot.

**Over the Moon**

“I used to drive my grandfather out to Lutzes. It was Prohibition. I was 16 or 17 driving a Pontiac for him. Remember where the Golden Eagle used to be? He had a little cranberry marsh across the street from it. I used to drive my granddad out there to pick up a couple bottles of moon about twice a month from him, not at the Golden Eagle, over to Lutzes.

**Pop**

“It was too much for my dad, so he sold the pop factory [1923] to George Gibson and George Mullen. And [H.L.] Miscol. They moved it in the old brewery garage in back of the canning factory.

**East Side**

“I knew everybody’s store on First and Second Street.

“The first building was Eugene Miller’s bicycle shop, then a filling station and a printing shop.

“We used to roller skate at the Armory. It had one of those old electric machines for music. The gym at the old Lincoln high school wasn’t very big so basketball was played at the Armory. They had a kind of locker room down there.

“Then came the Eagles Club, a vacant lot, Jackson’s tavern, Witter Hotel, Beardsley’s grocery store, Herschleb’s bakery, a furniture company, Arendt’s ice cream store, Geoghan’s, a shoeshine store, vacant lot, Daly’s, Penney’s, Sampson’s (Abel and Mullen—we owned the building).

“Stark’s had a little tobacco store. Then the Sugar Bowl. There was Tom and George and Jim. All Greek. Tom Poulos used to buy clothing from my dad. We used to stop and have a soda. Then Gleue’s [shoes].”

LEONA F. RUCINSKI  
English  
MARGARET M. SACHS  
English  
GERALD SAMPSON  
Manual Arts



Above, Leona Rucinski Reichert (1914-1992) taught a total of 50 years in the Wisconsin Rapids school district, from 1960-1985 as the first kindergarten teacher at Woodside and Two Mile (future site of U.S. Bank). Among her students were Uncle Dave’s brother Kenneth in that first year and, later, two of Dave’s daughters.

The 1940 census lists Margaret Sachs as a maid for the Joseph Staub family on Third Street. Staub’s daughter, Joan Staub Haas was a favorite contributor to *Artifacts*.

*East Side continued*

On the other side of the street, starting from the Market Square, Kruger had a grocery store. When Herschleb’s burned out, they moved their bakery over there. A woman’s hat store, Frank Gill paint shop, Daly’s, Smith’s hardware, Schill’s Buick garage, Wurl’s butcher shop, a Chinese laundry: When I was a kid, I used to deliver clothes for him on a bicycle. The first name, I think, was John. A drug store, little restaurant, later on, Gleue’s shoe store, Brauer’s clothing, Link’s butcher shop. Loock’s moved up there. A grocery store, a barber shop and vacant lot, the Wood County National Bank.

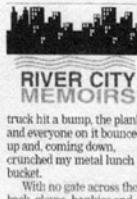
Before the theater, there used to be a tire shop. On the corner, a gas station—and tire shop in back of it, a vacant lot, then the Congregational church. [See photo below]



*All Things Must Pass*

**Sampson's showed how workin' for a living can kill you**

By DAVE ENGEL  
For the Daily Tribune  
W hat I know about workin' for a living, I learned from peas. Early on a Monday morning much like this, sleepy boys as young as 16 years old sat at the back of a truck on the east river bank (north of where the swimming pool used to be). Built as a brewery, it was the Sampson Canning Co.



extracted the peas. If the dumping had been done well, the pile ate itself up. If the vines were tangled, you wrestled with the mess you stood on and the vines clunked along empty; or if you pushed too hard, the machine clogged and had to be cleaned.

After "pitching" you took a turn watching peas fill bins that were dumped for transport to Rapids. With no gate across the

truck hit a bump, the plank and everyone on it bounced up and, coming down, crunched my metal lunch bucket.

Over the rotting pea vines a one-legged "old

monotonous standing in place on a concrete floor at a conveyor sorting cans and packing boxes; represented breaks on the cool, fragrant bank of the "hardest workin' river," watching carp jump.

Workin' for a living can kill you. I told one of the owners, Jim Sampson, years later.

Over by the rotting pea vines a one-legged "old

and get permission before you went to the doctor?"

"That must have been Nona Davis," Jim Sampson laughed.

And from Ms. Davis, the last great benefit of workin' for a living, the living itself.

At 95 cents per hour, it added up fast.

■■■■■

For an interview with Jim's brother and Sampson co-owner Ray Sampson, see later.

Over by the rotting pea vines a one-legged "old

Very first issue of *Artifacts II* featured Sampson's.

May 2004

Artifacts

**Peaboy Revisited—Again**

By Uncle Dave

UD: "So if you were the superintendent in 1962, that means you were my boss.

"I suppose so..."

You may have heard all this before but my literary consultant tells me it doesn't matter. If you're old, you have forgot what I have previously penned in the past 45 years of River City verbiage. If you're young, you don't know who I am and you're too busy on your cell phone to be reading this.

It was a genuine job and rough work for a 16-year-old edge-of-city slicker. At 6:30 a.m. at the cannery company on the banks of the Wisconsin, climbing aboard an open truck bed with a dozen or so peers for transport to the pea fields out Arpin way. Climbing aboard, I stashed my metal lunch bucket under a plank supported at the ends by concrete blocks. En route to what I remember as "Stoflet's," the truck hit a bump and the plank went boing, denting my lunch box and cracking the insulated thermos within.

Did I mention the Confederate flag decal? Probably came with the Jeff Davis \$50 bills.

With no thermos, I came up with one of the few successful entrepreneurial ventures of my life: purchasing two cans of cheap soda pop, probably Gibson's bottled by Sampson's, and freezing them overnight. At the work site, usually blazing hot, I savored one icy can and sold the other for twice what I paid for it. That would be about a dime.

The first part of the summer was spent untangling piles of pea vines with a pitchfork. The second half took place within the factory.

Note the round iron vessel pictured at left, filled with cans and moved via a control module in the left hand or pushed manually along a track above. Which I had never done before.

Suddenly, the whole thing slipped off the track and fell at my feet, the "handle" swooping down and striking my forearm. It was near the end of the night shift so I went home. Because of the swollen, throbbing, lump on my arm, I couldn't sleep much before I left for a rare visit to Dr. Hulme the following morning. He said it wasn't broken so I headed to Sampson's and reported to the woman who managed the office.

"Why didn't you come in and get permission from us before you went to that doctor?"

Jim Sampson laughed when I told him the story. "That sounds about it. Must have been Nona Davis."

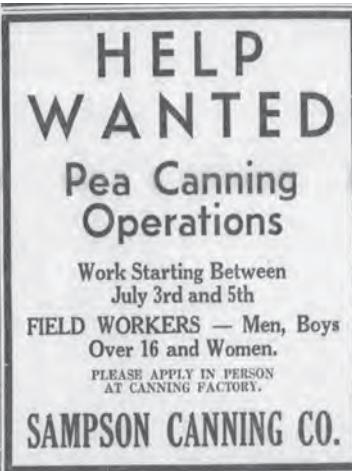
**Nona G. Davis**

Nona G. Davis, 93, of 341 15th Ave. N., Wisconsin Rapids, died early Sunday morning, Oct. 6, 2002, at Riverview Hospital.

She was a waitress at Wilpolt's Restaurant in Wisconsin Rapids for 17 years. After that, she was employed at Sampson's Canning Co. in Wisconsin Rapids as a secretary-bookkeeper retiring in 1971.

Rapids Tribune, May 17, 2004  
reprinted in *Ghost of Myself*

Sampson story dedicated to Bruce Zanow, fellow peaboy and friend of Jim Sampson. Two Mile Avenue's Bruce is the only person who was with me through all the schools: Two Mile, Grove, Lincoln and UWSP. —UD



95 cents  
per hour  
in 1961

**Canned Things**

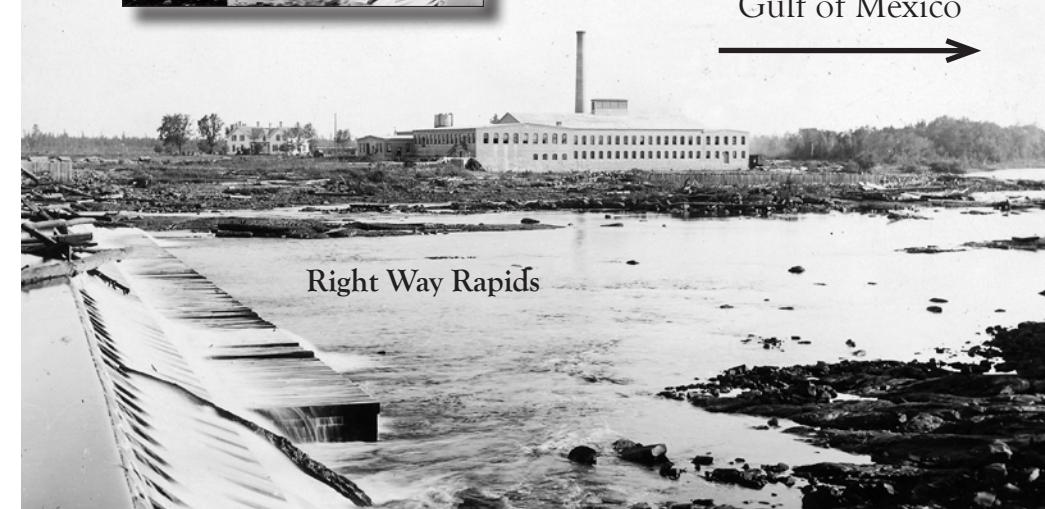
"Peas? I've never liked peas. Don't like the smell of 'm."

"Beans, I can eat."

—Jim Sampson

**Wrong Way Rapids**

Biron in the 1890s viewed from Town of Rudolph side



Gulf of Mexico

Jim Sampson married Rob Gringle's mother in 1961.

Dorothy Panzer Gringle Sampson was born in Rapids. She was well-known by the Don Engel family as the lady in charge at the Oliver Koonz and Orville Straub dental office above Haney Drugs. Half the family got Koonz and the other half, including David-Straub.

Dorothy saw a strong resemblance between UD's emerald eyes and his father's. And how sister Kathy was totally petrified by having to go to the dentist. Dorothy said, "She hated everything about it, even the building."

MRS. GERALD J. SAMPSON  
Keel Photo  
**Gringle-Sampson  
Ceremony Read**

In a quiet 4 o'clock ceremony on Dec. 30, Mrs. Dorothy Gringle, 1421 Apricot St., and Gerald J. Sampson, 1010 12th St. S., exchanged wedding vows before the Rev. Robert W. Kingdon at the First Congregational Church. Attendants for the couple were Mr. and Mrs. H. Ray Sampson.

After Jan. 6, the couple will be at home at 1010 12th St. S. Mrs. Sampson is employed as dental assistant at the offices of Drs. O. W. Koonz and O. O. Straub. Mr. Sampson is associated with the Sampson Canning Co.

Thanks to limnologist H. Bruse for noticing that the photo at left was reversed in #71 but correct in #64 and, now, in #72. The Biron house at left was recently offered for sale and then razed by ND (Nine Dragons), current owners of the paper mill.

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

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Send \$25 to SWCHC, 540 Third St. S., Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494 for membership and *Artifacts*  
or contact Lori Brost: lori@southwoodcountyhistory.org, 715-423-1580. Uncle Dave: kdengel@wctc.net.



Probably near Harshaw, Wis.: Julius Gash, A.F. Billmeyer, Alpha Snyder, Henry Sampson Jr., George Snyder, H.A. Sampson, Joe Snyder