

MERRILL'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

AND

Twenty Fifth Anniversary Edition of

The Merrill Daily Herald

October 1934

MERRILL, WISCONSIN

Price 25c Per Copy

FIFTY YEARS OF PROGRESS FROM MILL TOWN TO MERRILL OF TODAY

By Harold E. Miner

About 1843, less than a century ago, a group of prominent men found their attention drawn toward the wild region around the junction of the Prairie and Wisconsin rivers, way up in the Chipewewa Indian territory.

One of the finest stands of white pine in the world stood there. Hardly a log measured less than three squared board feet, and the stand was roughly twenty miles on a side. Two broad rivers flowed through the region ready to float the timber down to the mills at Galena, Illinois.

It was Pete Kelley who first began to log the pines, and he sent O. B. Smith and thirteen others up to do the work. They were the first settlers of any permanence in the region around what is now Merrill, and they came in 1844, four years before the organization of Wisconsin as a state. They walked from Chicago to Wausau, because there were no railroads north of Chicago in the whole mid-west at that time.

Their camp was at Trappe, and before they had finished with the white pine they were working around Schultz Spur. In the meantime, however, E. T. Bosworth, the second permanent settler, had come here in 1845 and was logging with Mr. Smith.

The only other names associated with Merrill in those primitive days of its first settlement are M. Bollier, who had a trading post on the west side of the Wisconsin river about one and a half miles below; a certain Stevens, who squatted at the mouth of the Prairie river but disappeared leaving no other record; and John Hogan, who took a squatters claim to a tract in 1843 and abandoned it to Andrew Warren in 1846.

Then began the trek to the pines. Headquarters were at Galena and at Sycamore, Berlin, Janesville, and Beloit, Wisconsin. From these centers supplies were taken to Stevens Point by wagon, then shipped up the river to the pines; and in 1844 regular communication by steamboat ran between Beloit and Little Bull Falls, now Mosinee. For a brief season the Wisconsin river presented a miniature picture of the glamorous river days on the Mississippi.

John and Alexander Stewart came in as the first big lumber operators and logged all over the district from 1852 to 1872. In that year they bought out W. D. MacIndoe's mill at Wausau, later the B. H. Heinemann company, and in 1884 Alexander Stewart was elected to the first of three terms in Congress.

In the meantime, Andrew Warren dragged some machinery up the river and began to build a small sawmill on the river bank. He started to build in 1846 and finished in 1848. After he had fallen ill, the work of putting the dam across the river at the foot of the present Mill street was carried on by J. J. Theobald, Bosworth, and Smith. The 400-pound pieces of mechanical equipment came in by canoe; a wooden water-wheel was built of live oak timbers; and in 1851, five years after the undertaking began, the first fleet of lumber left here for Galena.

O. B. Smith continued to pioneer, with Benjamin Cooper, he set up the first store here in 1854; it was also the first frame building, and occupied the site of the present D. E. Reinhart building. In the same year Tom Grundy and the Collinses opened the Pine River dells building, a dam

WHY A JUBILEE EDITION?

With this Jubilee Edition the Herald presents a self-imposed task that has outgrown itself many times during the course of the work. But as the size of the project developed, so did the magnitude of the idea behind it.

At first the Herald considered merely a four or eight page special section of the regular newspaper commemorating the anniversary of the Herald. It would have contained a few special articles, mainly pertaining to the last twenty-five years of the city's growth.

Now, this edition represents the results of an endeavor to present so thorough a picture of Merrill's fifty years of progress that a high school student twenty-five years from now need go back no further than these pages to learn what has gone before; to render a complete account of Merrill as it exists today for the benefit of readers of the next generation; and to offer a souvenir that people can keep as depicting all that is outstanding about Merrill, past and present.

Some of the articles in this section will have a priceless historical value. The reminiscences of Fred Smith, one of the two first white boys born here, have been awaited by many people for some time, and they are a first-hand account of early Jenny that later writers will not find available. Only by referring to this Jubilee Edition will they be able to learn the story. The same is true of other articles.

It was in recognition of this special souvenir value of the edition that the Herald decided on the semi-magazine format for presentation. It is not merely a special issue of the Daily Herald, but a supplement, undated, and intended to be preserved longer than an ordinary copy of the newspaper would conveniently last. It is printed with extra pains on a better quality of paper, stapled to keep it together, and issued in a size convenient for preservation.

Finished, this edition is the biggest job of printing ever done in Merrill. It required 6,000 pounds of paper and 100 pounds of ink. The accumulation of some of the material required literally months of preparation.

Our aim in undertaking the work will be fulfilled if the public will find the same sense of accomplishment in reading of the progress of Merrill during the past fifty years that came to the newspaper staff as they compared those early days with the present. It is by looking over the achievements of the city by years instead of by days that one arrives at a moving sense of progress and growth. The checks and disappointments of the detailed work of each day are forgotten; the sum of what is done stands out. From Jenny, the river mill town, to Merrill, industrial and trading center and county seat, is a long way, but it was traveled within fifty years, and in this edition we hope we have shown you how.

and another year building a mill. In that same eventful year 1846, just ten years after the first settlers hit the now rising settlement, the indefatigable O. B. Smith opened the first road into Merrill, coming up from Wausau; and Miss Etta Space took the job as mail rider between the two towns, covered the route in all weather on horseback for the first postmaster, Cyrus Strowbridge. She later married M. H. McCord, who became successively, a prominent lumberman, newspaperman, and governor of Arizona. In the meantime Mr. Smith continued to pioneer; his twins, Fred and Frank, were the first white boys born in Lincoln county. Frank died in 1914 in Spokane, Washington; Fred now lives at 508 S. Spruce street, Merrill.

The same O. B. Smith cut the first road north of here in 1849. The federal government had appropriated land for a military road from here to Ontonagon,

Michigan, via Pelican, Rhineland, and Eagle River. Mr. Smith took the job from here to Pelican and a Joe Fox continued from there on.

Meanwhile the rather disreputable Horicon railway scheme had invaded Merrill and fizzled, leaving half the community badly in debt. The project was to run the road from Milwaukee via Horicon and Berlin to Merrill. Andrew Warren, among others, permitted his interest in the community to overshadow his business judgment and mortgaged his mill to hand money to the promoters; farmers living along the right-of-way retained their land in the interest of the proposal and titles to these lands were affected for many years. The decade of the 1860's was an unusually happy one for the pioneer people in Jenny. It features all the reminiscences of the time, of which there are in the possession of the Herald office and the Merrill public library. One was

printed in the Jan. 20, 1921 issue of the Herald, giving ten detailed recollections of Mrs. Susan Russell, formerly the wife of Frank White, a prominent citizen in the '60's; a second is a letter written by Mrs. M. J. Miller Armstrong, who, as Mary Jane Miller, was one of the earliest teachers in the village school at Jenny, to a "Miss Jordan," and printed in the "School Best Echoes" of March, 1896. Excerpts from this charming and picturesque letter are printed in the massive "History of Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas Counties," of which a copy is held at the Herald office. A third reference in the reminiscences of Fred Smith, published August 28, 1921, in the Daily Herald.

The earliest recorded religious services in Jenny were separate Methodist services held in 1870 in the village school house by visiting pastors.

In 1872 Frank White built the first bridge across the Wisconsin

river at the same place where the old iron bridge stood at the foot of Park street, a block below the present concrete bridge and viaduct on 51. It was a wooden structure, but it was far better than the ferry service that was the only means of crossing the river before that.

During the winter and spring of that year 1872 a terrible smallpox epidemic hit the village, not disappearing until well into summer. The ravages were so widespread that at one time there was an actual shortage of people to care for the sick and bury the dead. A pest house was hastily built on East Main street and put in charge of William Averill; before long however, every house was a hospital. There was no doctor in Jenny then, but during the winter Dr. D. B. Wylie of Wausau came and vaccinated everyone who would permit it, even working far out into the lumber camps.

Wausau was incorporated in that year; the city of Tomahawk was unincorporated; Lincoln county was organized in 1874, however, with a population of 895; and that population was scattered throughout an area about four times the present size of the county, for several other counties were later whittled out of the original tract. Marathon county had been set off from Portage county in 1850 and included all that is now Lincoln county and much of other territory. Very shortly after 1850 the town of Jenny in Marathon county was formed; it was this town that in 1874 became Lincoln county with its rugged and scant population. The first township officers were W. Wilson, chairman; John Cooper, clerk; and Joe Snow, state supervisor. The heaviest taxpayers were O. B. Smith, George Snow, Andrew Warren, and A. S. Norway; at the meeting at which the town was organized these men opposed a \$1,000 school-house levy and were over-riden, although there were only two or three children of school age in the territory. The building was also used as a meeting house for community and religious services. After the town became a county, Taylor county split off a chunk of territory in the same year; Price county came in 1879; another county, which changed boundaries was named Langlade in 1886; was set out in 1879; and Oneida county was formed in 1881. All of them took territory from Lincoln county.

At the first meeting of the county board for Lincoln county, held October 23, 1874, "Section 12, Town 31, Range 6, commonly known as the village of Jenny," was designated as the seat of county government. In 1880 a courthouse block was purchased for \$1,200, and on this a court-house was erected the following year; a county jail was built north of this property in the fall of 1885. These are the first county buildings now house the Lincoln County normal school.

In 1875 Dan Scott began running a daily stage from Wausau to Merrill, before that the stages had run three times a week. On July first of that year the first daily road service began—and in the same year 6,000,000 feet of lumber floated past the town on its way down the river. Merrill at that time boasted two pianos.

The year 1880 marks a change in the character of the village of Jenny. Before that it was a slow-moving mill station, hardly worthy to be called a town. After that it became a city rapidly. The impetus came with the advent of the railroad in the spring of that year. It was the Wisconsin Valley Railroad company, later made

(Turn to the next page please)