

'I HANG UP MY SHINGLE IN GLEASON 45 YEARS AGO'

By Dr. W. H. Bayer, M.D.

In the fall of 1892, I arrived in Gleason on the Wm. Bradley, Marine, Tomahawk and Western Railroad, which was the only railroad into Gleason at that time, for the St. Paul railroad rap only as far as Heineman. Mr. Bradley was still building his little empire in that territory, and his railroad track had reached Doering. At Gleason he had built a large store, which still stands, and in it he established a bank. He had also erected a saw-mill and began operations. His railroad had crossed the Merrill-Dudley highway and chanced thru the Salem Gleason homestead, across his house, hence the name of the village. Mr. Bradley was very proud of his standing and of his achievements; and even some of his ventures did suffer some financial loss that mattered not, so long as his long distant objectives were attained.

It has often been asked me, "How did you ever come to locate in Gleason?" It happened thus: One of Mr. Bradley's employees in his Tomahawk bank was a Miss Ann Babcock. In our childhood she and I lived in the same neighborhood in Walworth County, Wisconsin; attended the same country school and later both lived in the village of Hony Creek. When he opened his bank at Gleason, he transferred Miss Babcock from Tomahawk to Gleason to run his new institution. To further develop the town it was quite necessary that he have a doctor located there; and Miss Babcock, knowing of my search for a location to begin a practice, wrote me concerning this new town, and thus I became acquainted with Gleason, Lincoln county and the North Woods.

My first impression of the place was one of some disappointment. I could not conceive how that seemingly small community could afford enough support to maintain a physician. Little did I realize the territory that I would soon be called on to serve, and the goodly number of people scattered throughout that field. But I resolved to remain and give it a trial. A large room over the Bradley store served very well for an office. The next day Chester Cone allowed me the use of his bicycle that I might go to Merrill, the county seat, to record my license at the Registrar's office, which was located in the old Court House, now the County Normal school building. The official in charge was Mr. Henrich, who was my first acquaintance in Merrill. The next day was to find a drug store. Mr. Henrich referred me to Mr. Fred Eagle, drug store, where I purchased some supplies. Mr. Eagle thus became my second acquaintance. Now I was prepared to begin my practice and I returned to Gleason. The following day I had my first patient and the succeeding days brought increasing numbers.

The following summer while the railroad was being extended farther south into the timber and had reached a distance of about eighteen miles from Gleason, Mr. Bradley died. His death was a shock to the community and all activity and growth seemed to cease, at least for the time being. A year or two after this the south end of this M.T.&W.R.R. and as far north as Grundy Junction was bought by the St. Paul road. Then the missing link between Heineman and Gleason was constructed. As a result of this our outlet was more direct to Merrill.

The surrounding country at that time was largely one vast tract of timber, yet interspersed with numerous settlers, closely adjacent in some sections and more widely scattered in others; each pushing back the forest to build a home or home. Logging camps were just being built in several instances throughout the timber region. There were four sawmills in this area: (1) The large mill at Heineman with its number of homes and employees; (2) The Bradley mill at Gleason, which was however of short duration, closing immediately after Mr. Bradley's death; (3) The Smith mill east of Dudley, a mill that had been in operation for some years, with its annual output; (4) The Hurbut mill at Elm City of considerable capacity.

In what I later termed my territory, probably the oldest and most primitive was a settlement around Heller. This section was settled a number of years before my advent, and I do not know its earlier history. This settlement was a kindly, friendly community; and I could not ask for a better or more honest people among whom to work. Proceeding eastward from there the habitations became scarce thru Doering and the Kasper-Hubbard settlement.

Then there was the older established settlement around Bloomville much of the same type as Heller.

Proceeding up the Dudley road we pass the old Gleason homestead and budding village; then on past the Delos Cole farmstead and fishing resort or the banks of the Prairie River, resort to the well known Dudley resort at the bend of the river; then crossing the bridge we proceed past the Hans Johnson resort, continuing on to the Adam Miller farm, that busy bee-hive of a place with its logging operations in the winter and the cattle business in the summer; then the adjacent Ed Bates' resort, to Elm City where A. H. Hurbut had established a saw-mill. A year or two before my arrival past the old Paul homestead, where he would sit at the culture and literary love displayed by people who would settle in what was almost a wilderness; again on and crossing the county line into Langlade county and into Parish, a relic of bygone days. The original saw-mill and houses here were just being torn down and dismantled. While tearing down the last house, a workman stepped on a nail resulting in a badly infected foot, and he became one of my first patients. This mill, a member of the early pioneer days, had been devoted exclusively to the sawing of pine lumber; and was located in a strictly pine belt of timber, as pine was then considered the only lumber worth cutting. Now we continue the journey back to the fork of the road at Dudley, and going east we pass the Smith mill, another early landmark; beyond there we again cross the county line and after three miles we reach the Bavarian settlement, which was also started some years previous and was settled by strictly German people as was quite evident by those trim and neat log buildings and the orderly and cleanly kept gardens and clearings. Those Bavarians were a thrifty and truly honest people.

Around the immediate vicinity of Gleason were scattered settlers of various nationalities; and to the north and southeast of Gleason and Bloomville, there was the recent and growing so-called Russian settlement. These folks were not really Russians, but had come from the Baltic provinces of Russia—largely from Latvia and Estonia. Their immigration had started about the turn of the century and continued for six or eight years. These newly Russians were a hard-working, honest and very appreciative people. I have often remarked that I worked among them for five or six years before the first account was not honored by prompt payment. This is a brief account of the territory I covered and the people I served, as seen by me at the dawn of the century.

Now for a better picture of the timber country and the Prairie river as Nature made them before the hand was wrought by the lumberjacks and settlers. The dense forests extending for miles and miles were given to growth of various trees; among the soft woods were hemlock, spruce, balsam, cedar, tamarack and aspens; among the hardwoods were birch, maple, ash, elm and an occasional oak in some areas. Before being molested by man there were countless deer, an occasional bear and howling wolves in these forests. Besides these there were many game birds, rabbits, squirrels and partridges. The latter made themselves conspicuous in the fall of the year at the edges of the clearings and openings or along the highway.

As I was making my visits in the country, many a meal did I secure before the law prohibited shooting game from a vehicle. There were two favorite localities which I learned to know in securing this game. One was the Bavarian country and the other was along the Chippewa road. The lakes and streams were well stocked with fish, both game-fish and pan-fish. But the Prairie river, which the Merrill-Parrish road paralleled through

out its course, was particularly famous as a trout stream for it was heavily stocked with speckled beauties, rainbow trout and an occasional German brown. The early beauties of this stream are beyond my powers of description. As it meanders its way, winding thru those magnificent forests; here calm and peaceful thru a stretch of marsh or over a smooth bed of the river; then rushing noisy over pebbles and rocks as it flows thru the dark deep shadows of overhanging trees and then suddenly a few rays of sunshine would sift thru the leaves and glimmer on the cool waters beneath.

Following the intensive logging operation with the removal of all saw-logs, and later the further de-

as Bunker Hill, north to Dunfield and beyond, and southwest thru Heineman to the Clark farm. Off times going as far as I could on the track, then lifting my vehicle from the track and parking it in the bushes. I would walk a half a mile or more into the woods to make my camp.

A number of trips were made south as far as Glendon or Algona as it was then called. This was the headquarters of the Barker and Stewart Lumber Co. These trips, however, were not made with my velocipede; the company would come up after me with their motor car on the railroad track in some cases of emergency, for I was much nearer by the measurement of time, the Wausau was much nearer by the measurement of mileage.

Heineman, the largest center of activity in this area, was four miles southwest of Gleason. About two years after I began my practice and my presence became known, calls from, or visits to Heineman were almost daily occurrences. This continued till the dry summer of 1910 when one of those devastating forest fires completely wiped out that village. It burned their large two-mill, their roomy barn, the store, the boarding house and hotel, immense piles of lumber and all the houses except one cottage and the school house; leaving just heaps of ashes and rubble. Happily no lives were lost. The fire spread rapidly eastward for several miles thru the cut over woods and enveloped all the farm settlements. Entire families were out fighting these fires and protecting their buildings. That night in this neighborhood a woman all alone in her home gave birth to a baby, but nature did not complete the task; she followed morning at daylight. I was called to finish this work. On the floor of the room I found the lady and baby on their bed consisting only of a blanket and a mattress of straw; there was not another soul in the house, nor was there anyone within sight.

As at Heineman the mill at Elm City is not so large, gave me much regular work. Mr. Hurbut, the owner, was more than grateful for my presence. It was much easier to call a physician from the seven mile point at Gleason than it had been previously to call one from Merrill, twenty-two miles distant. Mr. Hurbut became and remained one of my staunchest and most loyal friends and supporters.

Now to recount a few more of my personal experiences. The first spring I was to make a call a house on the Lincoln-Langlade county line. The road was in such a terrible miry condition that no horse could pull a buggy thru the first mile of road east of Dudley. So I went horse-back and even that method taxed the horse's ability to negotiate that mile.

Later in that first summer, one day following a heavy rain I was responding to a call over in the Chat country. Now, in these early roads many spots across low places or swamps were built up with corduroy. On this trip I came across a ten rod stretch of corduroy road. The water had risen to the top of the logs and they were just buoyant and ready to float away. I was too ignorant of the danger of attempting to travel over roads; dangers of the horse breaking a leg or getting caught fast between the logs, I kept on going. Fortunately I was driving "Trixie" that morning. Now, "Trixie" was a horse that was raised there on the outskirts of Gleason. She seemed to know instinctively the very nature of the Northland and how to maneuver in such places. She stepped very slowly and cautiously from log to log, almost human-like, never slipping or stepping between the logs; and soon we were safely over.

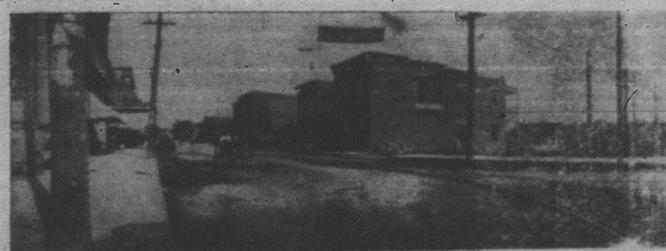
On a trip to Doering one snappy winter morning, just after daybreak, when driving thru a stretch of heavy



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petition by cutting of all remaining trees useable for pulp-wood and then repeated forest fires, these timber areas presented a picture of destruction wrought by scores of Hiroshimas. And as a further result the water of the Prairie river was much lowered; and the banks being denuded, there was no more shade in the pools where the trout were wont to play and feed. They gradually decreased in numbers, almost to the vanishing point; and of the many fishing resorts mentioned earlier not a single one remains: To one who has followed this marked change, it seems somewhat of a tragedy.

The roads of those first years were sadly lacking both in numbers and quality. Often the round-about mileage I had to drive to each destination was twice the distance that a direct drive would have been. For instance, my first trip to the Kasper settlement east of Doering, was made by way of the Merrill road, across Haymeadow Creek, then the so-called Cut-off road to Dutch Corners, then the Antigo road to my destination. That Cut-off road was the only open road to the south and it was barely passable. This situation applied only to the summer travel. In the winter, distances were much shorter as one could travel the frozen swamps and the log roads out thru the woods and with some of them being almost as direct and as smooth as a concrete highway of today. To obviate some of these long and difficult summer roads, we contrived to make use of the railroad track that ran in three directions from Gleason. Using an ordinary bicycle which rode on rail of the track, our village blacksmith contrived and built a flanged wheel to the size of a large dinner plate to ride on the opposite rail and the bars extending from the axle of the running wheel to three points of the bicycle and firmly attached thereto; one to the forked bridge at the hub of the front wheel, another to the same point of the rear wheel, and the third to the handle bar stem. Many a mile did I make with this contrivance going south as far



Here is Main Street in 1910 looking east from Mill street. Note the unpaved street, the electric railway tracks and the absence of automobiles. There was no parking problem in those days.