

Fred Smith, Twin Brother, Frank, First White Boys Born In Jenny

Editor's Note:—The following story was narrated by the late Fred Smith in 1932 to the late W. M. Allen of the Merrill Daily Herald. Mr. Smith, "the logger," played an important role in the development of this community.

Fred Smith was born in the village of Jenny, on July 20, 1858, and with his brother, Frank, were the first white boys born therein. For many years they were believed to have been the first white children born here, but recent inquiries have revealed the fact that Miss Liberty Strowbridge, sister of Mrs. Walter Alexander, of Wausau, was the first white child having been born about one year previous to the Smith twins.

Fred Smith was born in a house located just west of the present Oswald Westernman residence, 100 Court street, it having been the first building built in the village of Jenny, in 1858, and was destroyed by fire in 1888.

Mr. Oliver Barr Smith, father of Mr. Smith, came to Lincoln County from Kalia County, Illinois, in the fall of 1842.

"O. B." Smith, as he was familiarly known here, was in the year above mentioned, cradling grain on his father's farm in Illinois. For some time he had been affected with a "western fever." About mid-afternoon of a certain day, he hung his cradle on the corner of the fence, went to the house and informed his mother that he was "going to the pinery," which determination was indicative of the promptness with which he made his decisions in after life, in matters of personal affairs.

His mother gathered all of her son's worldly possessions and packed them in a bandanna handkerchief, the common "grip" of the day, scraped up all the money they could amounting to some \$7.00, and started the son off to seek his fortune. It required three weeks to complete the journey to Wausau. He spent that winter logging on the Eau Claire river, and making trips out of that river with lumber. He also spent three seasons on Trappe river and in the sawmills.

In connection with Ed. Bosworth, young Smith formed a partnership, and "ran the Pine river" the two or three succeeding years. They also worked together during the years 1863-5, on the Eagle river.

O. B. Smith was married in Kane County, Illinois, in 1855, to Sophronia Ravlin, and they became the parents of six children, two daughters and then four sons, all of whom (except one) were born in the village of Jenny, none of whom are living at present.

"Jenny Bull Falls." In 1847, Andrew Warren, Jr., who was destined to figure extensively in the early history activities of this section, came to what was then "Jenny Bull Falls."

Where and how "Jenny Bull Falls" got its name, is something that I never was able to determine satisfactorily, even from the oldest inhabitants. Mr. Smith avowed, and then proceeded to name the various "rapids" and "falls" along the Wisconsin river as follows:

"The first rapids on the Wisconsin river was Grand Rapids, below Stevens Point. Then 'Little Bull Falls' at Mosinee. 'Big Bull Falls' at Wausau. 'Jenny Bull Falls' at Jenny. The encyclopedia shows that the word 'Jenny' has reference to a female monkey, but how the word 'Bull' has bearing, is an involved question. The next 'rapids' is located at 'Grandfather'; then 'Grandmother'; then the 'Rocky Top', meaning 'bull' in Spanish; then follows the 'Whirlpool', Hat Rapids, 'Pelican Rapids', now Rhinelanders; 'Rainbow Rapids', 'Otter Rapids'; the end of the chain of rapids on the Wisconsin river, and each name represents some natural physical feature.

"Little Bull Falls" picked up more good men than all the rest of the rapids on the river. The most of them were pilots that would be knocked overboard by their own heads. They could get through the 'Big Whirlpool' below the old bridge, never to survive its raging torments.

Early Activities

In 1847 Andrew Warren, Jr., arrived from Kane County, Illinois, and prepared to build a sawmill, first erecting a set of log buildings, consisting of a house, boarding house, warehouse and barn, which were located on what is now East Main street, in front of the present location of the Citizens American Bank.

This section of country had not been surveyed at that time, and all was government land. On March 9, 1852, township 31, range 8, was sur-

veyed by the government, and on November 25, 1852, Andrew Warren entered from the government, five lots or fractions thereof, on the Wisconsin river, bounded by what is now north on Center avenue, to Sixth street, along Sixth street west to Prairie river, thence back again to the Wisconsin river, embracing a part of what is now the Stange company's yard, and what now constitutes the Third Ward.

"He had cleared land for a sawmill site, and erected what was then called a 'two-span' sawmill. The west span of the mill contained a perpendicular saw, for cutting big logs measuring from 40 to 50 inches thick. The east span was equipped with both a perpendicular and a rotary saw. The site of this mill was about where the Electric Light company's plant now stands. This plant, including the dam, was not completed until the fall of 1882. Jule Powsy, Sr., and O. B. Smith worked on this dam that year, it being their first work here.



Fred Smith

"This sawmill was operated for several winters. On June 1, 1854, O. B. Smith and B. P. Cooper bought the east span of the sawmill, containing the perpendicular and rotary saws for a consideration of \$4,000. The first payment made on this debt was 600,000 feet of No. 1, clear white pine lumber, at the tail of the mill, or the price of \$5.00 per thousand.

"Cooper & Smith ran the mill until about 1859, then sold out to Combs and Andrews, who came here from Pennsylvania.

Sawmill Goes Down the River

"About 1864-5, high water came in the spring, after the sawing season had ended, however, and carried away the entire mill.

"In the afternoon, of the day of the big flood, Frank Andrews, who was a very excited individual, in those times, always was supplied with thousands of feet of 2 and 3 inch cable, about the premises for emergencies.

"Calling his men to action, and through his orders, they attached the cable around and about the 'bull-wheel' in the mill, and also to a very large ox-frame used for shoeing oxen, located just back of where Dr. Reinhardt's office was located in later years. About 4 p.m. that day the mill, bull-wheel, and ox-frame, all went down the river.

"They built a new, different and better mill the following summer, and ran it until the spring of 1872.

"Thomas Scott, Henry Corcoran and John Ross, were laying lumber on the Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers, with headquarters at Galena, Ill.

"Then Scott bought Harrison Combs' interest in the mill, the firm being Scott, Andrews & Co. It was operated under that name until 1880, when the railroad came through, at which time they formed what was known as the 'Scott Lumber Company,' composed of P. P. Hixon and Pettibone of La Crosse, and T. B. Scott, of Jenny. They rebuilt the mill, and at one time had the biggest mill in the Wisconsin Valley, and which was operated under that name until it burned in about 1893-4.

"They practically quit rafting and running the river by this time. The railroad came into Wausau about 1874, and the sawmills of Jenny dropped their lumber down to Wausau, and shipped it by rail.

"The last fleet of lumber left Jenny in 1875, with Charles Richards as pilot. I hired out to 'tailout' the river from here to St. Louis, for Allen Space. My father thought to keep me young, and the hard work entailed. So I had only the 'fun'—if you call it so—of going over 'Big Bull' and 'Little Bull' falls, for when we got to Stevens Point with the fleet, father was there, and being a good friend of Richards, father succeeded in getting him to pay me off and send me home.

"They went on, had a fine trip, and were all back home inside of six weeks.

"Few people in the county today have any idea as to how lumber was rafted or run out of the river. I think there are about five men in the entire valley: George Langley, Wm. H. Kaiser, Henry Dudley, Ben Besay and Geo. Gibson.

"Returning to the Village of Jenny,—the only road leading to the village from the south, until about 1863, was the wagon road from Wausau,—not much of a road, at that, being principally a mud hole.

"The only building on the south side of what is now Main street, was an old boarding house, located where the Schram furniture and the Allen & Zander garage now stand. The first frame building was erected in 1854, and was located where the Merrill Daily Herald now stands. Cooper and Smith built it for office and store use, and it was a small one, too. That same building now is a part of the James Meunier residence, on first street, and still shows some of its original architecture.

"The next frame building erected was a tavern, built by Cyrus Strowbridge, on the corner now occupied by the American State bank, in 1856. This building now stands on the Joe York farm, on the bank of the Prairie river, and is occupied by the family of Thomas Moore. Strowbridge sold the building about 1860, to Hannibal Streeter, who sold it to Lansing Nor-joy, who later moved it out to the Joe York place.

"There was very little logging done in the Valley at that time, until after the railroad came through. About three to four million feet would be a big cut for the sawmills. There being no boom on the river to hold logs except at Wausau, Combs & Andrews and Scott & Andrews got all their logs off Prairie river, about two to four million feet per year.

"After the railroad came to Merrill, and booms and divides were built, then they commenced logging very extensively on the Wisconsin river. At one time in the late 80's and early 90's they divided out as high as three hundred and fifty million feet a season.

"The seven sawmills running in Merrill at that time, would cut as high as 125-million feet of lumber per season—the rest of the logs going to down-river firms.

"The next one built by Strowbridge was a dwelling on the southwest corner of what is now the Court House block, which was later sold to Gideon Young, who sold it to E. S. King, and it is now located on the corner of Second and Court streets.

and owned by the Warzinkas.

"Then he built the house on Main street, known as 'the Russell property,' which was sold to F. W. White, Sr.

"This makes three buildings built by Strowbridge in the 60's, which are now standing and occupied today.

"Zachariah Space built a tavern in 1858, on the corner now occupied by the Merrill Commercial College, Main and Court streets, which now stands on the northeast corner of the block, and is occupied by Albert Weller, as a residence.

"These were all the buildings on what is now Main street, for a number of years.

The First School House

"The first school house ever built in the village of Jenny was in the late 50's, and was a small building at the intersection of Court and Main streets, as now located, with a capacity of about eight or ten children, and not one of those who attended that school are alive today.

"The next school building was erected in 1863, at the upper end of the village, where the Dr. Walsh residence now stands. It would hold 24 pupils—and that's where I got my schooling.

"By the year 1873, this building had become too small, and the Third Ward school was built, with one room upstairs, and two downstairs, which I attended in 1875, as a last chance. There were but two teachers, and perhaps 35 to 40 pupils.

State Road Project

"They played politics and graft in the early 60's as well as they do today.

"In 1861, the state appropriated money to build what was called the Wausau North State Line Road, from Jenny to Lac Vieux Desert. O. B. Smith started at Jenny and cut the road to the mouth of the Pelican river; John Kurin cut it from Pelican to Eagle River; Joe Fox and Alex Drappier cut it from Eagle River to Lac Vieux Desert.

"There never was a team or a sled driven over that road, excepting the team they had with them, drawing a few big logs out of the road, and moving the company's outfit. The road was to be cut two rods wide, and graded in the center. When completed, it wasn't even a decent 'tote road.' It was cut in the winter and never a grub hoe put on the road. They followed all the swamps and crossed all the lakes they could possibly find on a practically straight route. Of the large amount of money appropriated for that road, perhaps 10% of it was used on the road. Where the rest of it went, nobody appeared to know.

"There was what was known as a 'Military Road', however, at that time, beginning at Shawano, and going through to Ontonagon, Michigan, used for transportation to and from the rich copper mines at that place, located on Lake Superior. Both roads were abandoned after a time, and the old 'tote road trail' followed up the Wisconsin Valley to Lac Vieux Desert, then over the 'Military Trail' to Ontonagon.

"The U. S. mail and all travel went



SCENE OF THE FIRE—Which destroyed the old Cosmo Theatre which stood for many years in the site of the Montgomery Ward Store.