

Elms Live On As Tribute To One Of City's Pioneers

By Florence Kingsley Mahon

It is a popular tradition that no woman reveals her true age, especially if she is on the shady side of forty. Contrary to that belief, I am going to acknowledge the fact that I was born in 1887 in the very house I live in now at 1709 East Main Street. I am proud to be identified as one of Merrill's old residents on this auspicious occasion of the city's centennial celebration.

My father, Richard G. Kingsley, popularly known in the old days as "Dick Kingsley," came to Merrill from Tomah in 1882. With him was my mother, the former Margaret McCoy of Tomah, and my sister, Mabel, who in later years was Mrs. Arthur Ebert.

The family lived for the first few years on Logan Avenue, in the first ward. A number of the old residents lived there at that time. That section of the town was near the grain house and water tank of the C. M. & St. P. Road. The coming of the rail road had been an important event in the life of the little sawmill town of Jenny, and my uncle, M. H. Mound of Tomah, had been one of the first engineers to pilot a train to the new village.

Shortly before I was born the family moved to the present residence, which was purchased from Herman Busch, a well known logger of that period.

My father had a store at the site where Otto Pophal now conducts business at 1323 East Main Street. He carried not only a stock of groceries but dry goods as well. Included were a number of bright calicoes and colored trinkets for his many Indian customers. In return they brought him furs and ground pine which he shipped to Chicago florists, and saddles of venison which were eagerly purchased by the city hotels.

According to family lore, the Indians were quiet and peaceful but very curious about everything. I have often heard my father tell about how he would be "bawled" with her "bawled" tongue in the "bawled" and suddenly she would be aware that there were several Indians outside looking in the window, no saying a word, just looking. At first she was terrified, expecting to be scalped at any minute, but since the window peeping seemed to be purely a friendly, hospitable gesture she schooled herself to continue her work under the watchful scrutiny of her new acquaintances.

When I was five years old the store was sold to Joe Poser of this city. Then for a number of years my father engaged in the buying and selling of forest products. He often boasted that he bought everything the farmers had to sell. Bark for the local and other nearby tanneries. Hub timber which he shipped to the Fish Wagon Co. of Racine and the Studebaker Corp. of South Bend; railroad ties which went to the Milwaukee Road, and hardwood logs sold to various lumber firms.

He used to tell how he saw farmers haul logs on bob sleds through the snow on Main St. on May 5th, as 1947 didn't have the latest spring on record after all.

Of course, all this business meant contacting the farmers at their homes. My sister and I often accompanied our dad on these trips in

the country. There were no high powered cars or concrete roads in those days. We just jogged along behind our horse "old Ned" over corduroy ruts that were pretty rugged to say the least. But no auto trip of later years brought greater enjoyment.

Another business venture was the R. G. Kingsley Box & Lumber Co., which was located in the Sixth Ward. This was disposed of later, and then for several years my father was president of the First National Bank, which was situated on the corner of Main and Poplar Sts., now occupied by the Peterman Grocery Dept. This bank was taken over by what is now the Citizens-American Bank of this city.

Following the merger of the banks my father decided to take a well-earned rest and retired from active business.

He had never been very prominent in politics, but I remember one time when his friends got his consent to run him for Assemblyman, on the Roublenick ticket against Dave Finn, a Democrat. Mr. Finn won, and that night the Democrats had a big barbecue at the Fair grounds to celebrate their victory. There was a torch light procession and as it went by our house which was dimly lighted as befitting a defeated candidate, some was called out: "Kingsley's in the soup." I remember even to this day how horrified I was. For I fully expected, my esteemed parent to be served as first course to the barbecue.

The years were going by. The cheery coal stove gave way to the steam heat, and electric lights supplanted the oil lamps. This latter improvement met with my hearty approval since it had been my job to polish the lamp chimneys. I remember when we had the telephone installed and how I rushed home from school to phone my chum Frie Cotter (later Mrs. Leon Avery), only to be so overcome by Mr. Bell's invention that I could only croak a feeble "hello" as my part of the conversation.

The school days were happy days. First at the Second Ward school where Mrs. Lydia Roche was the able principal; then high school. The first year in the old building on Streeter Square and then in the new edifice at the present location. Miss Anna Anderson was the guiding light of the high school and she had such a strong and vivid personality that all her old pupils remember her even to this day.

Another teacher that old timers remember with affection was Professor Ranzel, our music teacher. He came to Merrill right from the old country so he had a little difficulty with the English language which often proved very amusing to his adolescent pupils. I remember his excited announcement: "Tonight comes Livingston from Chicago with a big trombone!"

But the Professor was music personified, and no Stokowski ever directed an orchestra with greater fervor than he did. There were no musical contests in those days, but if there had been I am sure the Merrill High school would have captured many honors.

Some of those that I recall in the orchestra at the time that I wielded an energetic violin bow were: Hazel Willett (Mrs. Al Elen), Mabel Willett (Mrs. Leo Bartley), Genevieve Powell, the Livingston boys, Sydney and Cliff, Dell Curtis, now of Wausau and Fred Schroeder, deceased.

But time marched on. The folks celebrated their golden wedding and the next year my father died. The Mahons had been living in Wausau and we moved back now to the old residence.

I don't think anyone will deny the beauty of the modern home with its efficient kitchens and sunny picture windows. But a great deal can be said for the old homes too, for their beauty lies in the wealth of memories that fill every corner and make the rooms come alive. It is a thrill to set up the Christmas tree for our young grandson, Dick, in the very same spot where some fifty odd years ago my sister and I stood on Christmas mornings to view the handiwork of Santa Claus.

It is an inspiration to look at the tall stately elms in our yard with their branches lowering high, and remember when my father planted them. They live on, a tribute to a pioneer resident... one who always believed in Merrill and in its future growth and prosperity.

Pin Money

On the average, half of the property owners in Merrill feed hams in the back yard for a cow or two, and maybe a horse and some pigs and chickens.

Every morning some boy says to "that" the cows were to a pasture for the day and were brought back in the evening. Some boys drove a number of cows for people in the neighborhood for 10 and 20 cents a week for each cow.

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We Hope You Enjoy To The Fullest Merrill's Centennial Celebration

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S. Waldenburg, Prop.

William Johannes, early day harness maker and business man. His place of business was on Grand Avenue.