

Dip-Net Fishing On The First and Second Dams

The first and second dams across the Wisconsin river were excellent places for the men who wanted to do some dip-net fishing in the spring of each year. Dozens of them would sit up on the end of the dam aprons and try to fill their gunny sacks with anything they could get. They even spent the night on the dam with a lantern and had a fire on skids to keep warm.

The dip-net was a large square piece of netting about 8 feet long on the side. Two large boxes from the corners of the net were fastened on to the end of a pole about 16 feet long. For leverage the pole was placed on a triangle.

The net would be let down to the bottom and at frequent intervals lifted to see if anything had been caught.

"Kentucky Joe" Had A Question

At one time one of the stores across from the city hall was operated by a man known as "Kentucky Joe." After he had gone out of business he went around with suspenders, handkerchiefs and other items which he sold to make his living.

One of his favorite expressions was to ask the question: "Can you tell me the difference between 'remember' and 'recollect'?"

The answer he got was usually, "No." He would say:

"I remember loaning you a dollar but I don't recollect that you paid it back."

He usually got his dollar.



Shown here is Mrs. John Akey, a pioneer Merrill resident, whose death occurred several years ago. Mrs. Akey, whose late husband pioneered in the logging and lumber camps around the city and in northern Wisconsin, was active in the city's progress and was one of the early day workers in the St. Francis Xavier church. The Akeys had one son, Archie, a railroad man residing at Minocqua, and the following daughters: Mrs. Mabel Sowers, of Antigo; Mrs. Cora Gents of Blackwell; Mrs. Eva Clark of Minocqua; Mrs. Lois Kujawa and Mrs. Esther Maggy, both of San Francisco. Another daughter, Mrs. Ida Akey Hams, of Gleason, preceded her parents in death.



Mrs. Orson Russell, pioneer resident and mother of Miss Susan Russell. The latter, now retired, served as a teacher in this community for many years.

Recalls Big Pine River Fire When Home Was Burned

By Gus Boettcher
1505 Seventh Street

When I was 18 years old the big Pine River fire occurred. It was September 14, 1893. Dad and I had driven about 12 miles to get some flour ground at the grist mill across the river. We noticed the smoke in the distance, off towards home, and I told dad to stay at the mill and I would run back home. I ran across through a burning field to get to the house, and was forced to run pretty fast to avoid the flames. Mother was at home with my brother, who was only 16 days old. I told mother to pack and get to the wagon road, while I went back to town to get my brother, Charlie, who was two years older than I. In the meantime dad had reached home.

When Charlie and I returned the farmhouse and barns had been destroyed by the flames. We lost our frame house, log barns filled with hay and grain, and some equipment. Our sheep and cattle were in a section of woods not burned and they returned safely to the farm the next day.

The fire, which started at Big Eddy, burned out 21 farmers in the five miles it traveled to the east. Swope's mill was lost with all its lumber.

I remember that the next day, while I was with grandfather, a very high wind came up to fan the flames, and grandpa said that the world was coming to an end. However, the wind brought a heavy rain which put the fire out. Two of the Fred Weege children, who had been taken into a plowed field by their mother, were suffocated by smoke. Our place burned about 6:30 p.m. That night we were forced to sleep on the ground outdoors and the next day we moved into town to my uncle's place near where the Anson and Gilley plant is now located.

After the fire, Berger and Posey started a sawmill just below our place and I worked there scaling logs. They told pa to bring in his logs for a new house and barns and they would saw them without charge. In this way dad was able to rebuild very cheaply. Everyone pitched in to put up the new buildings and that's the way neighbors helped each other out in those early days.

I'll be 72 next December 4 and was born in Pine River while my parents, Ferdinand Boettcher and Minnie Zastrow were visiting at my uncle's farm. There were seven boys and three girls in the family. Brothers and sisters still living are Charlie, Herbert, Henry and Mrs. Albert (Anella) Kanitz, Pine River; Gus Arnold and Mrs. Charles (Lena) Karau, Merrill; and Bill, well-known as "Hemlock" Bill, who works in the woods. Otto and Lizzie have passed away.

When I was 11 years old, I worked right along with pa mowing hay. When I was 14 I went into the woods and saved that winter with a seven-footer, Otto Gruetzmacher.

When I was 20 I went west to my uncle's place and worked for him and others in the harvest fields. I got 18 dollars a month and board the first year and finally was getting \$150 a day. I did this work for five summers, and in the winters I would work in the woods. I spent 15 winters in the woods.

Back in the early days in Pine River we were poor but happy. We would get a quarter from pa when we wanted to go to a dance and everyone was sociable. There were no roads except the wagon trails. There was but one team of horses among the seven farmers there at that time and neighbors exchanged labor. The farmers there then were Wm. Buck, Wm. Gruetzmacher, August Gruetzmacher, August Gross, Ferdinand Latzig, Wm. Vorpaes and dad.

We raised most of our food. I remember that we built a log hut in the garden from which to shoot deer which would otherwise destroy the crops. Dad would call in some hunter to do the shooting as he never would permit a gun in the house. I remember that pa called in Bill Ackerman one time and Bill shot five deer in one afternoon. I was four years old when the family moved to the Pine River farm. It was an 80-acre farm and the Indians used the back forty for a camping ground. They were good friends and never would molest your property.

They worked on the log drives and I recall one spring day they came to the house and asked mother if she would fix them up a meal. Mother said she would if they would be satisfied with what she had. She fixed them up some soup of milk and flour and they declared it was the best meal they had ever tasted. The next

day they brought her some maple sugar.

I came to Merrill to work in 1904 and delivered feed and grain for Spiegelberg's grist mill, which was located across the river at the end of the dam.

I worked in the Excelsior mill in 1905-06 and then at the old Bryan feed and fruit store where the present Co-op feed mill is located. I bought a well-drilling outfit in the spring of 1906 and drilled wells, thrashed and baled hay. I sold the outfit that fall. I was at Peterman Bros. from 1910 to 1923 as foreman of their warehouse.

I worked 18½ years as custodian at the Merrill postoffice until my retirement when I was 65. I then worked four years at Samling & Menke, sacking and selling wood.

I was married in Pine River in 1902 to Hattie Hagedorn, also a pioneer who came to Merrill from Egg Harbor, Mich., when she was four years old. One of our children died in infancy. The others are Harold, Farmington, Minn.; Mrs. R. L. (Dorothy) Peters, Merrill; Arthur, Merrill; Mrs. Ed. (Bertha) Kropkin, Wausau; and Mrs. H. L. (Florence) Karpenske, at home.

10,000 Subjects

The last time Jule Thielman was elected mayor of Merrill he gave a big party in the old Berard opera house. (Over the stage appeared a sign which read: "The Ruler of 10,000 People.")



Here is a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce held at the Hotel Badger in 1910.

John Van Hacks, Stan Van Hacks, Harry Krom, John Brandt, Dr. E. R. Oyen, Harry Kolls, Aug. Mancke, Geo. Rothlisberg, Matt Tockley, Mike Sharpe, Noah Ger, Mattie, E. J. Solberg, C. E. Livingston, Norman Chisholm, W. B. Guillem, Dr. J. W. Percutsky, R. E. Runke, Wm. Ebert, Joe A. Emerich, George Emerich, Wm. F. Peterman, Stephen Golas, Albert Anderson, Reinhardt Meyer, E. E. Howland, Chas. F. Fowler, J. W. Zipp, A. H. Cole, John Telling, Geo. A. Foster, Jul. Kriepke, Herman Kriepke, A. Griest, Chas. Roidel, Wm. M. Allen, Theo. Ebert, John Ebert, Gus. Frank C. J. Kinzel, Emil Kieple, Walter Linder, Chas. W. Cizer, Jul. Kriepke, Herman Kriepke, John Wenzel, Henry Patzer. Can you recognize others?

Oldest Furniture Business In City

One of the oldest furniture houses in the city in point of years and the oldest furniture business is the Nushbaum Furniture Store.

A. J. Nushbaum, the founder, came from France, where he learned the trade of cabinet maker, and in 1881 came to Merrill from La Crosse, starting the cabinet and furniture business on East Main street, where he continued until his death in 1909. J. A. Nushbaum, his son, succeeded to the business of which he is sole proprietor at 1023 East Main street. J. A. Nushbaum was born in La Crosse and came here with his parents. The present building was erected in 1908.

First Concrete Blocks

The first cement block construction work that we can remember was the building of the Grandfather Paper Mill, or the Merrill Paper Company, as it was then known.

The cement blocks were made at the site of the building. Our old friend, Louis Touben, one of the best known lumberjacks in Northern Wisconsin, mixed concrete on the job and we, as kids, watched with great interest the mauling of the blocks.

The first big lumber operators were John and Alexander Stewart, who logged all over the district from 1852 to 1872.

1847
MERRILL
CENTENNIAL
1947