

# Editor Draws On Memory For His Impressions Of Pioneer Times

By William T. Evjue

For the purposes of an article appropriate for the columns of the Merrill Daily Herald's special edition celebrating the 100th anniversary of the old home town, I am assuming that by recourse to some source of magic I can make real that memorable saying, "backward, turn backward, oh time, in thy flight." The Herald has asked me to take its readers back to the old Merrill that I knew as a boy.

I was born in a primitive little lumberjack's house that was located across the street from Charlie Bruce's home nearly 55 years ago. My father and mother, born in Norway, were in the great tide of immigration that brought thousands of Germans, Scandinavians and French-Canadians into the pineries of the north in the 70's. Before the advent of the railroads my father was in that intrepid crew of men who took lumber on huge rafts down the Wisconsin river, to the Mississippi and then on to St. Louis. I have heard him tell of walking from Wausau to Eagle River to take a job in the woods. And now let me draw on memory for a lot of fragmentary impressions that I hope will fit into a mosaic and a pattern of the old Merrill.

The symphony of sawmill whistles at five o'clock in the morning summoning the workers to the beginning of the day's work at six a.m.

The early residents could call by name the whistles of every one of the eight sawmills along the river—the T. B. Scott Lumber Co., the A. H. Stange Lumber Co., the H. W. Wright Lumber Co., the Wolf River Lumber Co., the Brooks and Ross Lumber Co., the Gilkey and Anson Lumber Co., the Champagne Lumber Co., and the Merrill Lumber Co. . . . D. D. Tarr, superintendent of the Merrill Boom Co., and always the owner of a spirited horse, driving to the booms in the Wisconsin river in the 6th ward where the logs that came down the river from the woods were sorted and sent into lanes of water where they would be sent to the various mills. . . . Each log was marked with an indentation representing the mill to which the log was to be sent, just as cattle are branded on the western ranges. . . . The fun, dangerous fun, we kids used to have "running logs" in the booms of the Scott Lumber Co. where the present dam is located. Carrying dinner, while barefooted on hot summer days, to dad at the Champagne Lumber Co. . . . The song of the bandsaw on summer nights when night crews were working. . . . The tragedy when Louis Knutson was killed



Home of Mrs. N. P. Erjue, mother of Wm. T. Evjue.

when the Scott Lumber Co. slab burner toppled over. . . . The heavy toll of death and accident in the mills, and the plea of the mill owners that they couldn't afford to put in safety appliances because they would be unable to compete with Michigan and Minnesota operators. . . . The first strike, Merrill led by Bob Schilling of Milwaukee. The men were working 11 hours a day, six days a week, and they struck for a 10-hour day with 14 hours of pay.

The agents who made a good living selling hospital tickets to men working in the logging camps during the winter. The tickets cost five dollars and entitled the holder to hospital care if taken sick. . . . The hospitals stretching from Rhineland to Wisconsin Rapids, filled with lumberjacks in the spring of the year, who had contracted typhoid, smallpox, or other contagious diseases in the unsanitary environment of the logging camps. . . . 60 men sleeping in a bunk house in a logging camp with no ventilation, and scores of wet socks hung up around the big belled stove to dry. . . . The big thrill on our first visit to a logging camp when we saw high piles of freshly made doughnuts and

long rows of dried apple pie just out of the wood burning ranges in the cook's shanty. . . . The men in the woods were off in another world, with mountains of snow blocking primitive roads and with the food in the camp, therefore, limited to staples like salt pork and beans, potatoes, doughnuts, dried apple pie and black coffee. . . . Log drives in the spring of the year, lumberjacks wading out in the river in frigid temperatures, many later becoming victims of rheumatism. . . . What a hell-roaring town Merrill was when the men came down out of the camps. . . . Five depot saloons doing a land-office business. . . . Several Merrill saloon keepers getting rich charging the lumberjacks 10 per cent for cashing their time checks and "rolling" others when they had reached proper alcoholic stupor. . . . Poor old John Halvorson, one of the best blacksmiths that ever went into the north woods, being tormented by a lot of boys while he was on his annual binge after the long winter stretch in the logging camps. . . . Alec Empey's and all the other barber shops open nearly every night until midnight to shave and cut the hair of the hundreds coming down out of the woods. . . . In those days most of the barber shops had bath tubs which were rented to customers.

That was the rhythm of this little lumberjack community, work in the sawmills in the summer and in the logging camps during the winter. . . . The main street of Merrill, a sea of mud during the spring of the year with plants at each corner to enable pedestrians to cross the street. . . . Uncouth lumberjacks sitting on the iron rails in front of Pete Berard's saloon and sipping squirts of tobacco juice with unerring accuracy into the gutter beyond the board sidewalk. . . . John Drinker's drug store, Duke Theilman's butcher shop, Peterman Bros., the Norway drug store, the old corner where R. G. Kingsley and the tall Mr. Ladd guarded the money of the community. . . . The old post-office building, located near the present site of the Cosmo theater, which served as a summer social center and where the populace gathered each Sunday to wait for the mail in the days before free delivery. . . . Baron von Kaltenborn, the father of the radio commentator, coming down the street in his frock coat, striped trousers, immaculately groomed whiskers, expansive white vest, and his gold headed cane. . . . European aristocracy set down in this primitive setting in the new world. Dear old Dr. La Count the family physician who never seemed

The incessant guerilla warfare between the Republican Merrill Advocate, published by Chris Johnson, and the Democratic Northern Wisconsin News, published by Fred Curtis. No holds were barred and no one ever heard of any libel laws. . . . Henry Littlejohn, the somber undertaker and furniture dealer, undertaking and furniture went together in those days. C. F. Hankwitz handled the mortuary needs of the wood side. . . . The traveling Italian street musicians who played along the business streets and passed the hat along the curbs. The young bloods of the town would collect \$15 to hire the Italians to

play for a dance in the evening at Parkview and Tuckley's or Barrett's dance hall. . . . Old Mike Shape, with his Jim Jeffries shoulders.

Old "Nigger George," the only Negro in Merrill, who lived a precarious life by doing odd jobs in saloons and business places. The children, to whom the colored man was a novelty, loved this celebrated town character. . . . Kentucky Joe downy sitting on a beer keg in front of his place of business on a hot muggy night. . . . One of Merrill's earliest sensations—the murder of Dave Sarvis, a local saloon keeper, and the shooting of two police officers, Bob Triax and Frank Heitz by Dave Handier. . . . The disintegrating ruins of the old Eagle House. . . . The pride that was Merrill's when Ed King's indefatigable efforts for a street railway system became a reality. . . . The poor motorman in the winter time who had to drive these street cars on open, unprotected platforms that called for fur coats and three or four pairs of socks. . . . The first 50 cents I ever made—carrying a load of hard work to Lew Helman's upstairs tailor shop.

The old Scott mansion up on the hill which the youngsters bypassed because of the belief that it was haunted. . . . Braatz park, now Riverside, where old time German sangfests were held and dances were held in the summer time. Tons of good fire wood, the trimmings from the sawmills, going down the river. . . . The Lincoln county fair ground where Merrill's favorite camper, Silver Leaf, was sure to go off her feet inside the three-quarter pole and make the grandstand groan. . . . The Frank E. Long stock company, dripping with melodrama, which held forth at the Berard opera house at county fair time. . . . Omev Smith, who played the "stern" "Hearts and Flowers" during tender scenes from the sawmills. . . . Moose Poirer's free lunch counter where one could almost make out a meal with a five cent glass of beer. . . . The civic pride which swelled in Merrill when the St. John's Lutheran church on Third street pealed forth with three bells ringing at the same time before Sunday morning worship. . . . Anna E. Anderson, principal of the Merrill High school, who maintained an iron discipline that would bring consternation in present day high schools. . . . The graduating class of 1899, 17 in number, the largest in the history of Merrill up to that time. This year there were 144 graduates at the Merrill High school, and the population of Merrill is not larger than it was in 1899. . . . The running track that we laid out in Talbot's potato patch each fall and how Martin and Adeline Talbot, a boy named Archambault and this writer used to run ourselves to exhaustion in barefoot sprints around the oval. . . . Baseball games out in the street and the frowns that were directed at the boys when his dray insisted on driving through center field and the pitching box. On occasion, when the ball went through dear old Mrs. Hubbard's window, the game was promptly called because of players being in. . . . The



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