

Came To Watch First Reaper On Pine River Farm

By Charles Boettcher

I was born in Merrill on December 11, 1873 and when six or seven years old went to Pine River, where my parents had gone into farming. I have been on the farm most of my life, although I worked six summers and part of the seventh, as a handy man around the T. B. Scott Co. plant, and spent four winters in the woods. While in the woods I sawed and swamped for John Roche, Hunter and Anderson, and Fred Smith.

I was married in St. John's Lutheran church, Merrill, on August 1, 1902, to Helen Lemke, who was born in Watertown and who came here as a baby. Our two children are Mrs. Leo (Lillian) Lelstikow, on the old homestead in Pine River, and Mrs. Robert (Irene) Cohrs, who also lives on the Pine River farm.

Oxen were used for all farm operations in the early days and were our only means of transport. We didn't get to town very often and when we did we either walked or went by wagon hauled by oxen.

The cradle and scythe were used in cutting grain before the advent of the mower. The women would follow the cradle to bind the grain.

I recall that my uncle, the late August Gross, got the first reaper that I know of and everyone came from miles around to see it. August lived later in the state of Washington.

When father got a binder, he refused to ride on it and I, then about 13 years old, took over that job.

We raised wheat, oats, barley and peas. Our cows would wander into the woods and I remember hunting them a whole week on one occasion before I found them.

Our surplus farm products were taken to town, but we saw no cash money as we traded for the groceries we needed. It wasn't until the cheese factory came that we got any cash. The first cheese factory was built by Pfister across the line in Marathon county, a mile from Pine's Corners. Farmers sold their milk here and used to say it was "like finding money."

Then, close to 50 years ago, J. A. Newell started the second cheese factory in Pine River. Known as the Pine River Farmers Dairy Co., it's still going. This factory, located east on Highway 64 about two and one-half miles, was purchased by a group of Pine River farmers in 1912 and has been operated by them since.

My first job came when I was going on 14 years and was at my uncle, Herman Boettcher's brickyard, the first brickyard here and built in the early '80's. I carried brick. The bricks were made by moulding the clay found in the vicinity into bricks, carrying them by hand to the drying sheds, and then wheeling them to the kiln. Soft brick, those at the top of the piles in the kiln, sold for \$6 to \$7 a thousand. The hard brick, those in the middle, sold for \$8 and \$9 a thousand.

August Meyer started a brickyard across the road a little later.

The brick homes you see today in the Towns of Maine, Berlin, Scott and Cornish, and many of the brick homes in Merrill, as well as the buildings, were made with brick from these yards. The old August Loeck house in Merrill is made of Boettcher brick and St. John's Lutheran church, Merrill, of Meyer brick. The yards were out east on Highway 64 about two miles. Before starting the brickyard, Herman Boettcher operated a general store on River street.

One of the most vivid of my early recollections is of the big fire of September 4, 1893, but I believe my brother has written about that.

I bought the old George Washburn farm on February 15, 1902.

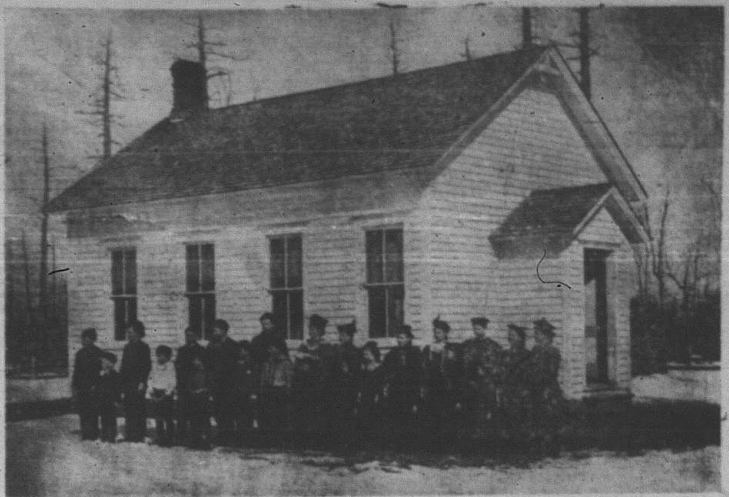
During my farming career I worked on farms in Minnesota for five summers.

My sister, Mrs. Amelia Kanitz, Pine River, who came here as a baby from Wausau, lives in Pine River and was 75 years old the 23rd of last February.

Another sister, Mrs. Karl (Helen) Karau, and her husband, live in Merrill.

Our family consisted, in the order of their ages, Amelia, Pine River; Charles, Pine River; Gus, Merrill; Elizabeth, who died when she was 18; Mrs. Karau, Merrill; Herbert, on the home farm; William, Otto, deceased; Henry, Pine River; and Arnold, Merrill.

George G. Green, Wausau, who became a clergyman and for many years was superintendent of schools of Marathon county, was a fellow worker with O. B. Smith in the Pete Kelley logging camp down at Trappe in the winter of 1844-45.



OLD COMBS SCHOOL: This Town of Merrill school now known as the North Star school, was built about 1885. It was originally called the Combs school after Harrison Combs, whose mill was about three-fourths of a mile to the northeast. This picture was taken 52 years ago this spring. From the left are: Frank Oldenberg, Ben Carl, Ed. Young, Albert Fidler, Herman Kruse, Herman Oldenberg, Freddie Carl, Joe Hartner, J. P. Martin, the teacher, Herman Carl, Minnie Hartner, Norah Durancieu, Lena Hartner, Helen Fidler, Clara Oldenberg, Tillie Carl, Ida Kruse, Mary Oldenberg, Elva Young, Tressie Richtner, Myrtle Young, Nettie Young and Francis Raasch.

First Murder Here In 1873; Man Broke Jail

The first murder to be committed in this section occurred in the winter of 1873. A William Reed operated a logging camp up on Newwood. Mr. Reed had engaged two men to chop down timber, William Tech and Thomas Rockford. The two choppers had worked only three or four days, when Rockford killed Tech with a double-bitted axe. Evidently some difficulty had arisen between the two men, but what, no one learned. Tech was dead and Rockford did not tell.

Rockford was arrested and put in the Marathon county jail, which was only a small building made of logs, and stood on the northwest corner of the Wausau court house square.

When the time came to put Rockford on trial for murder, he broke jail and was never heard from again.

Scott and Andrews built a logging camp near the lower Frairie River Delta 72 years ago. John Leland was one of the "choppers."

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