Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dudley Created Community Out Of The Wilderness

By Mrs. Sarah Dudley Critchfield

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dudley were married in Jenny (now Merrill) on December 9, 1873 at the home of T. P. Mathews. For their honeymoon they drove to Newwood and started their long and interesting careers by logging that winter for Mr. Mathews. Returning that spring they began housekeeping in a house, the kitchen part of which remains in the present W. B. Chilsen home.

Three children were born there: Olive, Henry and Walter. Henry died in infancy.

December 1, 1876 they loaded their belongings on a sleigh and with their two babies, Olive and Walter, then six weeks old, left Merrill as the school bell was ringing at 9 a.m. headed for another camp for winter logging.

Their destination became their future home — known throughout the years as Dudley. Enroute, they ate their lunch and fed their horses at Barnes Creek, arriving at the deserted logging camp at sundown.

A picture of Dudley, Wisconsin, taken many years ago.

The shanties were built of logs, chinked with mud and moss, with shaker roofs and pole floors. The cook's shanty had a wide board floor, however, and this concession was granted so that better food might be assured and so that everyone would remain in her good graces. This shanty had a rough board table running down its length and there were benches, a cook stove and bunk. Bed for the babies the first night was a table top.

There was no clearing—just woods and more woods. For two years there were no neighbors between Merrill and Rhinelander.

The late Nellie West Patterson was the first white child born; I the second, two weeks later; and Richard two years later.

The Lord cares for women and children, and surely was with the pioneers as no doctor ever arrived on a case in less than 24 hours. The quickest way of getting word to him was by messenger on horseback.

I had scarlet fever and erysipelas combined when I was two years old. My father came in from the woods at noon and I was then raging with fever and my head was swollen as large as a bucket. (As he told me later, it never went down). One of the men went on horseback for Dr. Wiley, who arrived the next day at noon.

Doctors today would no doubt laugh to know he checked the spreading with a cranberry poultice. However, with mother's care, and following his directions, I am here to tell this story.

The road there followed the river, making it at least 25 miles. They were a far cry from the roads of today. Then they were practically impassable. Father walked from Merrill with a sack of flour and other commodities on his back. He often walked all the way behind his wagon so he could pry and lift rocks from the road bed.

In those early years I can only recall hearing of two deaths: Mrs. Gulliver Wright and Mr. Fritsch, the latter killed by a falling tree.

The logging continued and with perseverance, hardships and hard labor, there began to be a little clearing of land. The Indians helped and mother always said: "They were good neighbors if they did not have liquor."

On one occasion the Indians saved the two children who had strayed through the woods road, thinking they were going to meet their father.

Another time, when mother was alone, a horse went wild with its nose filled with porcupine quills. Seeing her in distress, two Indians caught the horse and pulled out the quills. The Indians were then in camp across the river from the house.

Clearing a homestead was a different proposition from buying a farm today. Many of the stumps that had to be dynamited were as big and bigger than the stump of the last large pine, a log of which is on display in the yard of the courthouse at Merrill.

Other pioneers and fortune hunters were coming into the country and taking up homesteads. With their help, a log house was raised for the family, but the shanty remained, as this was the only stopping place between Merrill and Rhilelander. Two log houses were built later in the same manner. The cedar shingles on them were hand made by George L. Claussen of Galilee, Pa., to which place he later returned to make his home. He passed away on January 1, 1947.

Mr. Claussen came here as a young lad and worked for father several years before going to Echo Lake to make his home. Through Mrs. Averill, who had the Merrill postoffice, father obtained a box, approximately three feet by four feet, and the postoffice was established in our home, George being assistant postmaster.

Mail was first carried on horseback twice a week, then by horse with sulky and cutter. Johnny Scott of Merrill was the first carrier.

The store was later sold to Mr. and Mrs. J. Hayman of Parrish, they building on the home addition. Retiring from business, they sold to her son, J. G. Callsen and lived their remaining years in Merrill.

Another log building was erected near where J. G. Callsen's store now stands and was operated as a store by Mr. Cleveland. Later it was used for a school house. Dora Bates was the first teacher and she was followed by Margaret Frisch. An occasional church service was also held in this building until the little white school house that now stands on the hill was built through the efforts of my father, who donated the land for its erection in the year of 1883.

Later, C. H. Blanchard came from Oshkosh and operated a general store in this building while constructing the store building now owned by Mr. Callsen. After that the building was used as the Town Hall and then moved to where it now stands. Since that time it has been a home, a meeting place for the Ladies Aid, granary and horse barn. It's probably an eyesore to the community now — but it meant a great deal in the past.

There were no places of amusement in those early days. The one highlight of the year for us four children was the circus. Free passes were given the family for the privilege of plastering the buildings with advertising.

Mother would have us dressed in our best and fed about daylight. Then father would load us into the lumber wagon and we would be on our way. Once we stayed in the evening for Uncle Tom's Cabin. That was most memorable, because we all had new shoes and returned with blisters on our heels. We were accustomed to going barefoot. I still think that was the longest ride, and the longest night coming home, that I can remember.

On several occasions father built out-of-doors platforms for summer dances. I remember that on one Fourth of July they danced until daylight, with a heavy frost on the platform.

Later the dance hall was built near the store. Dances were held mainly on holidays and a masquerade was always held on February 22.

One of the first signs of spring was the sight of 25 or 30 wornout horses following a sleigh with several men in it coming down the schoolhouse hill. This meant that the men would be staying over night and I still can hear my father say: "Supper, breakfast and lodging—one dollar."

Another sign of spring was when mother started saying ashes in barrels, and pouring on water to make lye. When she had saved enough lye, a fire would be built under a huge iron kettle near the river. The art of making soft soap was to be demonstrated. By using the scraps of grease and rind accumulated during the winter she would usually have a barrel or more of soap to be used for washing dishes and scrubbing.

Still another sign of spring was the scraping of pitch off the ends of the pine logs that had been unloaded on the river banks making rollways for the spring drive. Some of the pitch was saved for caulking boats and canoes, sores on horses, etc., but our greatest joy was when we could persuade some elder to boil some down for gum. That was REAL gum for exercising the teeth.

Then followed the real excitement of the year. A dam was built at the head of the Dells to back up the water, and the gates were opened and the logs sluiced through — the spring drive was on! It was really a sight to remember as the logs floated along and bumped into the rocks of the Dells.

The river in front of our house was always a solid log jam and we tested our skill by running across the logs on our way to school.

Tents were pitched at the back of the store for the overflow of men at night. Here they would sleep and attempt to dry themselves around the fire. Log drivers did not change to dry clothes, but worked on the theory that they would avoid colds and rheumatism by not changing.

Cards, mumbledy-peg and peanut eating were enjoyed while waiting for high water. Peanuts did not come in five-cent cellophane packages. They were sold from the barrel and in sacks large enough to hold a peck of potatoes. Practically every man would buy them.

On one occasion, Miss Hollis, who was the teacher, and myself went to the Dells and sat on a rock to watch the logs come down. We were engrossed in watching and did not realize that the gates were to be opened at that time. The water kept rising and we finally discovered we were marooned on the rock. Joe McGinnis came to our rescue and carried us to shore. Hence came the name "School Marm's Rock."

Logs were driven to Merrill in this manner and it took two to three weeks, according to the success of high water. A boat, called the wannigan, went ahead, carrying the food and cook's equipment.

Father had attained his experience earlier when he drove fleets of logs down the Wisconsin river and the

The late Henry Dudley