



A Newsletter
From
Forest History
Association of Wisconsin, Inc.
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1985-86

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From the Deacon Seat*

As I write these lines, I am about to head for the island of Jamaica in the sub-tropical Carribean Sea, where I will be taking part in a special forestry project for the Jamaican Ministry of Forests.

I wonder if Jamaicans have their equivalent of our famed Paul Bunyan? How do their loggers compare with our skilled axemen and sawyers? Our unusually colder and snowier winter makes my thoughts wander to the winter days of the early Wisconsin lumberjacks. I recall accounts of their logging camps, felling with crosscut saws, horse-skidding, river-drives and the seemingly endless pinery. Do Jamaican wood-workers have a similar forest heritage? My month-long experience on that Carribean island should be quite educational!

Our secretary informs me that several inquiries have been received regarding the availability of the 1985 annual meeting proceedings, which all members receive as one of the benefits of membership in the Association.

Although all copy has been prepared and edited, our perennial cash flow problem dictates a delay in the actual printing and distribution of those proceedings. Printing is now scheduled for the end of March and mailing will take place during April. Your patience will be appreciated.

Membership retention, as well as new enrollments, continues to be a prime concern to our Board of Director. At its November 1985 meeting, it was decided to have our Secretary provide each board member with a list of former Association members within their respective geographical areas. These are to be contacted by phone, letter or in person, to encourage their reinstatement as members. Hopefully, these efforts will result in the increased financial support needed to revitalize our program of preserving forest history for future generations.

Tom Albrecht
President

* The "deacon seat", according to L. G. Sorden's "Lumberjack Lingo", was the one classic piece of camp furniture, built in the outer end of the muzzle-loading bunks. Usually made of half a log, flat side up. The men sat around the fire before turning in, resting, smoking and talking.

Sequel to "Petrified Man" Story

The November issue of "Chips & Sawdust" recounted the bizarre tale of two loggers who, in 1926, supposedly found the mummified remains of an early French explorer in the hollow trunk of a basswood tree near Murry, north of Ladysmith. The petrified man reportedly was dressed in buckskin and a coonskin cap and held a muzzle-loading pistol.

Inquiries by the "C & S" editor to the Rusk County Historical Society and the State Historical Society for verification and more details failed to bring any response.

However, Association member Dave Lee of Phillips forwarded the article to the editor of the Ladysmith News, who promptly provided us with a copy of a feature on this event that he had written for the April 23, 1983 issue of his newspaper. Editor John Terrill's research had disclosed that the original story had appeared on the front page of the January 21, 1926 issue of the Rusk County Journal and had been written by that paper's reporter, Manley Hinshaw. The end of the story, on an inside page, had the author's signature, "Rusk County Lyre". Terrill's comment: "A more appropriate word would have been 'liar'." He went on to say:

"Most local readers took Hinshaw's article with a grain of salt. They had previously read one of the 'Lyre's' stories about an inventor . . . who had extracted static electricity out of the air to run a large motor and wood saw."

It appears that the State Historical Society exposed the hoax by asking several questions, viz.:

How can a body of flesh be changed to stone or petrified except by the substitution of mineral matter for decaying cells of the body?

What is there about the sap of a basswood tree that could possibly carry mineral matter to a decaying body in its hollow inside? . . . a body in a standing tree could not be reached at all by mineral impregnated water.

If the body of a man in a tree had been petrified, how could the integuments of his clothing escape the same fate.

Editor Terrill also pointed out in his article that the hoax received attention in R. Bruce Allison's "Wisconsin Famous and Historic Trees", published in 1982. A Chapter in "Wisconsin Lore and Legend" also devotes considerable space to the subject.

So ends the saga of "the petrified man" . . . perhaps for the time being only, because the story is so fascinating it continues to crop up in newspapers and magazines all over the country.

A New "Ghost Town" Saga

Our Association has received another welcome addition to its library from new member Joyce I. Bant of Prentice, titled "Culture and Continuity of Knox Mills, Wisconsin, 1864-1931".

Although Mrs. Bant calls herself an "amateur historian", this work exhibits her professionalism and dedication to thoroughness by the extent of her research and overall presentation of the voluminous material she gathered over a two-year period. She prefaces her saga of Knox Mills by saying "The story wasn't planned from the beginning. As material was gathered the story unfolded." Profusely documented (185 references), she details the early development of this now extinct community from the coming of the Wisconsin Central Railroad into Price County in 1873 to its eventual demise in 1931 when the area's timber resources became depleted and subsequent farming endeavors failed.

This absorbing account comprises as complete a history as can be found of the Knox brothers, pioneer loggers and lumbermen from New Hampshire, who came to found Knox Mills by way of Wausau and the Willow River basin of Oneida County. The extent of their Willow River operations is graphically described by Mrs. Bant:

"During the season of 1878-79 they banked one million feet of timber there in twenty-seven days with a crew of twenty-four men, three pairs of horses and a yoke of oxen, the closest haul being one mile and the longest a mile and three-quarters. Before the season was over they would bank another two million feet of timber for shipment down the Wisconsin River to their mill at Wausau. To get an idea of what a million feet of timber is, you could imagine what it would build. It would take 5,000 to 10,000 feet to build a good-sized comfortable home by 1883 standards. A million feet would provide homes for an average village of 500 inhabitants. In five months that year, with one crew of men, the Knox brothers banked enough timber to build three such villages. In the winter of 1882-83, the total cut in Price County was enough to build 200 to 300 villages that size."

Mrs. Bant's richly detailed account includes much more than the logging and lumbering history of the Knox Mills area. There is also the land speculation era, the arrival of Swedish immigrants, the property tax war between settlers and lumbermen, the losing struggle of the pioneer farmers, and references to numerous other logging enterprises that flourished briefly. This 70-page documentary of the birth and death of Knox Mills, Wisconsin is unquestionably a most valuable addition to the forest history of Price County and north central Wisconsin.

The Shay Lake Situation on the Nicolet National Forest

Association charter member JOHN W. ("Wes") WHITE of Eagle River, retired U. S. Forest Service land examiner and acquisition expert, has accumulated an extensive file and personal reminiscences on the early days of the Nicolet and Chequamegon National Forests. A particularly interesting recollection of his pertains to a controversial situation that developed between the U. S. Forest Service and the Thunder Lake Lumber Company of Rhinelander when it was railroad logging east of Eagle River in the Shay Lake area. In Wes's own words:

"Sometime in the late 1930's (probably in 1938), two facts became apparent: Number one was that there was a gross error in the original survey of lands in Section 5 - T. 39. - R. 12 E., around Shay Lake, and number two that the Thunder Lake Lumber Company was extending its logging railroad right-of-way into Section 5 and obviously intended to log to the east shore of Shay Lake on the basis of its ownership of Lots 1, 2, 3 and other lands in Section 5."

"At this point, the U. S. Forest Service did two things:

1. It notified the Thunder Lake Lumber Company that timber located inside the original meander line was on "vacant land" and any cutting inside that line would be considered as trespass on federal government property.
2. It processed a report on the situation and asked for a re-survey by the General Land Office."

"Understandably, the Thunder Lake Lumber Company was mightily upset by this announcement, but eventually agreed to hold up further logging in that area until the situation could be resolved."

"The area was re-surveyed in 1939 and new Lots 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 were established in Section 5, and officially approved shortly thereafter. These new lots were also declared "vacant lands" and as such belonged to the United States of America."

"In due course, The Thunder Lake Lumber Company and the U. S. Forest Service worked out an agreement whereby land was exchanged for timber stumpage (Thunder Lake Lumber Company Case #1 - P). Under the terms of that agreement, \$7,127.05 worth of selectively-marked timber on those "vacant lands" was traded for 1,018.15 acres of lands owned by the Thunder Lake Lumber Company."

"Because the company wanted to "hot log" the area, that is to cut, skid and load directly on to its railroad, it became necessary for the Forest Service to have a scaler on the job full-time so as to account for the agreed \$7,127.05 worth of timber stumpage."

The experiences of that scaler during the 4 to 5 weeks he spent in the Thunder Lake Lumber Company's last logging camp on the Nicolet National Forest in 1940 will be recounted in the next issue of "Chips & Sawdust".

Lumbermen and Libraries

Detractors of early-day lumbermen often conveniently overlook the many philanthropies of those same "timber barons", as they were disparagingly called.

In actual fact, they not only built scores of villages, many of which are the thriving towns and cities of today, but they also contributed to the cultural development of their citizens by helping to establish libraries in many of those communities.

That is the story told by Mary Roddis Connor (Mrs. Gordon R. Connor), past president of our Association, at a meeting of the Wisconsin Valley Library Association last fall.

In a paper titled "Lumbermen and Libraries On Our Wisconsin Frontiers", Mrs. Connor detailed how the libraries of Marshfield and Laona became realities through the efforts of W. D. Connor, founder of the Connor Lumber Company.

Other lumbermen who were prime movers in getting libraries for their communities in the Wisconsin River Valley were T. B. Scott at Merrill, the Brown family in Rhinelander and Joseph Dessert in Mosinee, to mention only a few. In Mrs. Connors' opinion: "All of them were people who cared about later generations."

Early Loggers Had Hospital Insurance for \$10.00 Per Year

An article in the Marinette EAGLE-STAR (11/5/85) detailed the innovative insurance plans for loggers that existed in northeastern Wisconsin in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

One example was the Menominee River Hospital in Marinette which was organized in 1883. Its officials sold "insurance tickets" to logging camp workers for \$10.00 per year. The ticket holder was then entitled to "admission, treatment and

board . . . in the Menominee River Hospital . . . when sick or disabled by injury received while in the discharge of his duties of employment." These early hospitalization tickets even permitted the treatment of chronic, contagious and infectious diseases; however, tickets issued in 1911 specifically excluded the treatment of such diseases.

Before passage of Wisconsin's pioneering industrial workers compensation law in 1911, injured lumberjacks usually had to pay for their own medical costs. Only a few more progressive companies helped with their worker's expenses. Since the prevailing wages in those times were rarely more than \$1.00 per day (plus board), serious injuries often took a major portion of a worker's cash income for the year. The \$10.00 per year insurance ticket was therefore a bargain that found many ready buyers.

Insurance tickets issued in 1911 by the Marinette and Menominee Hospital Company were surprisingly liberal with the benefits granted. These included the payment of \$5.00 per week to the injured ticket holder while undergoing treatment, medicine shipped to any part of the country, and treatment in hospitals at Merrill, Wisconsin, Marquette, Michigan or "any other hospital outside of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula." However, if the patient was at one of the other hospitals, he would not receive the \$5.00 weekly payment, but the hospitals would receive \$1.00 per day for the treatment they provided. Another benefit printed on the ticket: "baths free at any time."

The key person in the promotion of these hospitalization insurance plans was the ticket salesman who travelled from camp to camp, either on foot or by riding the caboose of a logging railroad. His role included being a "carrier of news from the cities, a story-teller in many dialects and custodian of many secrets."

(Editor's Note: The clipping about the foregoing article was submitted by Association past-president John Saemann. We encourage other members to follow his example by sending to "C & S" clippings from their local newspapers that may feature interesting accounts related to our forest history. Even if not re-written and used, they will become useful additions to the Association's reference files.)

Soo Line Railroad History

Our Association receives, on a gratis exchange basis, the publications of a number of organizations. Among the very best in quality of its printing, photographic reproduction and general interest of its articles, is "The Soo", a quarterly mag-

zine published by the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society, a not-for-profit Wisconsin corporation based in Neenah, Wisconsin.

The editor of this outstanding periodical is LARRY EASTON of Neenah, a long time member of our Association.

"The Soo" often features well-documented articles that are also well-illustrated on the lumbering origins of numerous Wisconsin communities along the Wisconsin Central Railway system, which eventually became part of the Soo Line Railroad (Minneapolis, Sault Ste. Marie and Atlantic Railway).

The October, 1985 issue of "The Soo" should be of special interest to Association members who are railroad history buffs, particularly involving former lumbering towns. One article deals with the village of Hewitt, two miles east of Marshfield, which began its existence in 1872 as "Section 28" because it was 28 miles from the Stevens Point depot on the Wisconsin Central. Another exceptionally interesting article in this issue is that by Association member BILL O'GARA of Wisconsin Rapids. He recounts the story of Wisconsin's "postcard king" whose specialty included many photos of depots along the Wisconsin Central. Illustrating this article are photos of the depots of Milladore, Lomira, Fond du Lac, Spencer, Cadott, Auburndale, Allenton, Colby and Abbotsford. According to the editor's note, the text of this article appeared originally in "Wisconsin Trails", Spring 1978.

Copies of October, 1985 issue of "The Soo" are available by writing to Editor Larry Easton at 1315 Green Acres Lane, Neenah, WI 54956.

Members In The News

MILES K. BENSON, Rhinelander, has been appointed operations manager in the timberlands division of Consolidated Papers, Inc. Benson previously had served as a research forester, forest planning manager and services manager.

MALCOLM ROSHOLT, Rosholt, well-known author and historian, has published another pictorial history titled "Wisconsin Trains". Railroad buffs may obtain further information by writing to him at P. O. Box 104, Rosholt, WI 54473.

JACQUE & DOROTHY VALLIER, Mequon, received the prestigious William B. Greeley Award from the American Forestry Association for their distinguished service to forestry and resource conservation. Their life-long dedication to conservation education was exemplified by their major contributions toward the establishment of several forest-related institutions: the Me-

nominee Logging Camp Museum on the Menominee Indian Reservation, the Audubon Society's camp in northwestern Wisconsin, Treehaven field facility of the School of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and the Schlitz Audubon Center in Milwaukee.

WILLIAM KAUTH, Mosinee, has become chairman of the Wisconsin Tree Farm Committee for a two-year term, succeeding DAVE LEE, Phillips.

Welcome, New Members

JOYCE I. BANT

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EDMUND H. DRAGER

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Committee Chairmen 1985-86

1986 Annual Meeting

To be appointed

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Distinguished Service Awards

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