



A History Of
STRUM
AND
THE TOWN OF UNITY

By Roy Matson

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Introduction

Between the time of his stroke in 1970 and his death in 1979, my father spent most of his time researching and writing the story of his town. In many ways his stroke is responsible for this book, since its forcing retirement on him gave him the time needed and its health implications impressed on him the urgency of the project.

We all must understand as we read this history that it deals primarily with Strum's early years. My father was keenly aware that his generation is the last to have some acquaintance with the early settlers of this area. The incident he mentions when as a young man he discovered the actual sign that Ole Kittleson had first written the name "Strum" held, I believe, special significance. He realized that the history of the years before roughly 1920 had to be recorded now lest they be completely forgotten. So we probably won't see our own or even our parent's names in this book. It remains for someone younger to record Strum's more recent story.

There will inevitably be some errors in this book. Some of the pictures are not completely identified and I'm sure some buildings and dates will be wrong. I welcome any correction and will see that corrections are printed in one of the local papers for all to see.

Lastly, I would like to mention one of my father's last wishes. He felt that old pictures and other papers should be kept in a place where they would be available for exhibition and for the use of future generations. He always felt that the library was the logical place for these valuable things to be stored and shown off. As I proofed his papers and struggled over the old pictures, I began to realize how important it is that all the old pictures be identified now before no one is left who remembers. Those of us who have old pictures should identify them now and attach written explanations to them. We should consider donating especially old pictures to the library. Better they be kept there for all to enjoy than to waste away in someone's attic.

Erik Matson
Rhineland, WI
December, 1989

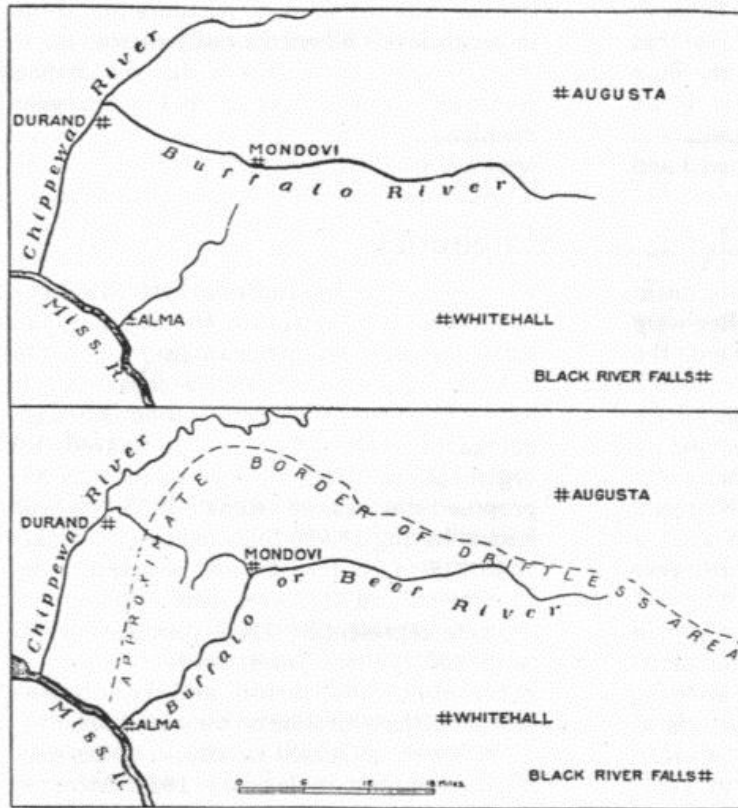
A Bit of Geology

We in the Beef River Valley live in the so called driftless area, the part of Wisconsin untouched by several glacial advances, the last of which remade the face of this state some 10,000 years ago. These masses of snow, turned to ice, formed somewhere above Hudson Bay. With proper temperatures and climate prevailing for thousands of years, continual heavy snows resulted in an ice build-up that scientists estimate to have been nearly two miles thick. The immense weight caused a movement outward and as additional snow

and ice built up this outward action continued, leveling and carrying everything in its path. Release of the water held in ice caps at this time would raise sea levels 180 to 200 feet.

There were four such advances that touched our state during various ice ages, all in forms of tongues that moved in several directions. The time required for the build-up, total movement and melting of such a tongue of 10,000 feet thickness or more is supposed to be around 130,000 years.

How is all this known? This tremendous weight carried rock, stone and silt as the



Original course of the Beef River

Present course

and ice built up this outward action continued, leveling and carrying everything in its path.

Snow now covers about 10% of the earth's surface. Scientists estimate that cover during the glacial age was about 30%, and so much water was ice that the oceans were about 330 feet lower than today. The earth's water today is agreed to be about 97% ocean water, 2%

glacier was forced to move. Then it left scratches on bed rock, formed deposits of earth in forms that marked direction and tore up beds of hard material and left parts of these beds hundreds of miles from the original site. The only spot in our state left untouched was the driftless area of which our river valley is part of the northern boundary. This area

contains roughly all of hilly western Wisconsin south to beyond Prairie du Chien and east to Vernon, Monroe and part of Jackson counties.

In any event, we live in a valley that may have been affected by the immense run-off from this two mile thick ice lobe. The rough northern rim of hills of the Beef River Valley marks the end of the end of its movement. Further east about 12 miles from here scientists have determined it touched Trempealeau County and undoubtedly a great amount of milky white glacial run-off found its way past our present doors.

Whether it was at that time that this run-off washed the present course of the Beef River to Beef Sloughs has not been determined, but that melting waters moved west through the Bear Creek area to the Chippewa River is an accepted fact. The light silt washed easily and may have separated as the stream slowed and

formed a dam that directed water into the lower river channel.

The Chippewa River basin drained a great part of this ice tongue and the present Lowes Creek lowlands supplied an outlet to that stream and undoubtedly derived some contours as a result of that great mass of ice. The hollowed out depths of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior may have deterred movements of some ice tongues. Superior has a depth of 700 feet in several places. Present sound tests indicate ice to a thickness of 6200 feet in Greenland and figures in excess of that amount are prevalent in the Antarctic. It is felt that ice required so much moisture that drops in ocean levels allowed woolly mastadons to cross the Bering Strait and that no channel separated Great Britain from the European mainland.

Wilderness to Statehood

The first white men to travel Wisconsin territory were french missionaries. They were followed by explorers and fur traders, the former commissioned by the French government to map rivers and the general are and to assume title of great stretches of land by proclamation in the name of the French king. Nicolas Perrot, whose company established a post at Trempealeau in 1685, held such a ceremony at the place during his three year stay.

The English and the French agreed on a treaty in 1763 whereby the former assumed questionable control that lasted until after the Revolutionary War. One of the first acts of the new United States congress was to establish the Northwest Territory in 1787. This measure took possession of all lands north of the Ohio River and east of the Missouri River with all lands being eligible for settlement.

As populations increased in these areas conventions were held, constitutions formed and admittance as states of the union voted. Ohio was on the first of these, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan following. Wisconsin territory

was governed by Indiana and Michigan successively. Agitation to organize this territory as a state began in 1845. The territorial governor ordered a convention in 1846 and on August 1 a certification shows 125 delegates from 25 counties seated for organization. The total population of the proposed state was an estimated 155,000, with Racine having 17,983 followed by Milwaukee at 15,925. Crawford County which included La Crosse and this area was allowed one delegate representing 1,444 people. Debate continued for two years, consumating in an acceptable constitution and Wisconsin's becoming the 30th state on May 29, 1848.

Settlement increased rapidly, counties grew in number and in January 1854 Attorney George Gale, a member of the legislature, was able to separate lands from newly formed Buffalo and Jackson counties to create another county which he named Trempealeau. Trempealeau Village was known as Montoville back in those days and at a March, 1854 meeting the board of that township met and organized. Their area comprised the whole of the new county. By 1857 the towns of Gale,

Trempealeau, Preston and Arcadia had been formed and settlers in the northeast end of the county around Beef River Station had received urgings to establish a township. No action is apparent as of that year, but in November, 1858 Sumner was represented on the board and in November, 1859 Clerk W. H. Thomas turned a tax roll over to Treasurer A. B. Ayers charging him with collection of \$4,890.50. The area known as Sumner included all lands above township line 24 North, Ranges 7, 8 and 9 West, which would include all of present Albion, Unity and Sumner townships. Tax

The First White Man

It is accepted fact the Beef River Valley was a sort of boundary between the Winnebago tribe on the south and Chippewas on the north. The latter were very busy warring with the powerful but scattered tribes to the west and thus paid little attention to their peaceful neighbors of the Winnebago tribe in this region. The Winnebago were known to hunt in this valley although few lived here, possibly less than 25 in this vicinity. The valley seemed to be a peaceable place and logs of early trappers and traders mention it often as a fairly safe route for transporting furs and supplies purchased on other waterways. Large Winnebago encampments were further south and closer to the Mississippi.

Jacques Porlier is believed to be the first white man to have spent a winter in the Beef River Valley. He was born at Montreal in 1765 and grew up among cultured people, receiving the best education the city could offer at the time. He intended to become a priest but changed his mind and worked for his father in the fur trade. Porlier came to Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1791 and for a time tutored children, making him perhaps Wisconsin's first teacher.

There was a difference in various stories of

Early Trails and Roads

The Beef River Valley was an accepted passageway for early fur traders who usually headquartered at Green Bay. Neither the Winnebago tribe to the south nor the Chippewas

collection was a problem. Only 29 tax payers were listed and a good dozen of those were speculators and investors from afar. Population of this new township seemed to be less than one person per square mile.

Settlement moved slowly those first years. The light soil of the Beef River valley did not appeal to early pioneers who came from New England states, Ohio and Indiana and could judge farm lands. These men shunned steep coulee hillsides and chose the best lower table acres, if available.

his venture in the fur trade. Some speak of his operation on the Sauk, Buffalo and Pine Rivers. Another story makes special mention of the Buffalo and St. Croix streams. At the latter place he met a woman living with her Indian mother who was to become his wife. Upon returning to Green Bay, he received several public service appointments while the Wisconsin territory was governed by Indiana and Michigan. One of these appointments was a chief justice of Brown County, at the time an area encompassing much of northeastern Wisconsin.

His stay on the Beef River occurred sometime between 1792 and 1795. It may have been very short and the place may be revealed in voluminous French notes now in the State Historical Society archives in Madison. Some future French student may find a description of the spot. A suggestion that the local lake be called Lake Porlier received little consideration at the time this river was dammed. Green Bay has a Porlier street and a Porlier school.

A second fur buyer named J. C. Jacobs wintered on the Beef River during 1819-1820. He wrote John Lawe, a Green Bay representative, that no Indians wintered there; therefore there was no business.

north of here frequented this area, making it a relatively safe route for travel.

Indian trails usually followed ridges. The first land speculators and some settlers used

these paths as land in two valleys could be viewed simultaneously. Also, heavy loaded wagons of the settlers could avoid marshland or larger streams. The bluff road (tower road) was one of these trails, developed into a road that served southbound Unity residents until 1917.

With statehood in 1848 came pressures from settled points such as La Crosse, Sparta, Black River Falls and Eau Claire for established travel right-of-ways. The legislature responded by providing for appointment of three commissioners from the affected areas with authorization to survey and lay out state roads. No money except survey expense was provided.

Of interest to this area, three commissioners were appointed to lay a road from Fountain City to Beef River Station. The date was March 1, 1856, the first time George Silkworth's stopping place is mentioned. Harvey Farrington

arrived in Pancake Valley (Mondovi) in 1855. The next spring he was one of three men appointed to lay out a road from Hudson to Sparta via Eau Galle mills, Bear Creek (Durand), Harvey Farrington's and Black River Falls. Undoubtedly this road connected with an Eau Claire-Black River Falls road laid out earlier.

This canvas topped wagons heading westward down this valley had a right-of-way for travel, but one can be certain the drivers followed the easiest path. After crossing the Chippewa River at Bear Creek, most wagons headed north a day or two then turned westward for a fairly easy trip into Minnesota.

Locally, the Town of Sumner had a surveyor who kept accurate records of highway actions those early days. An 1877 entry shows an appropriation of \$75.00 to build a bridge across the Beef River near the P. B. Williams residence.

Early Beef River Valley Settlers

The very first pioneers to acquire land and settle in this valley arrived in 1855. Harvey Farrington and his party were in Pancake Valley (Mondovi area) that year and George Silkworth acquired title at the Eau Claire land office to part of section 2, T24N, R7 in March of the same year. Silkworth, who seems to have been active here at an earlier date, immediately erected a building intended as a stop on the Sparta-Eau Claire stage line and called it "Beef River Station". A few families found work at Silkworth's and lived around his place of business, located about a mile northeast of future Osseo.

This story concerns the central part of northern Trempealeau County and the earliest settlement in that area. Three families arrived in 1856 and acquired land near present Hamlin. The winter of 1856-1857 was very harsh with much snow, causing the W. Moon family to travel back to Dane County. The Cross and James Chase families stayed. Moon traded his land to Russell Bower who came here in June, 1857 and became an established part of the Hamlin community. A short time later he erected a small building to serve as a

store and supplied new settlers with staples of the day. Among those who moved in were the Rice and Henry Teeple families who replaced Cross and Chase. Isaac Webster paid \$200.00 in gold for about 16 acres of section 24 and became a neighbor to the east.

Along about 1859, Dennis Lawler, an Irish tailor, became the first settler of present Unity township by moving onto a quarter in Section 24, T24, R8. He was followed a year or two later by Phineas B. Williams who took land in Section 10, same area. It has been told that a marsh of wild hay attracted the latter because he was a horse trader and feed seemed plentiful. Jack Carter was said to have located in Section 18, T24, R8 in 1863, but no assessment of his place can be found until after the Civil War.

It seems these few New Englanders were the only people in this locality before the Civil War years. However, there were many speculators and squatters who lived here a very short time, only to move on.

The end of the Civil War brought many veterans looking for settlement into the Beef River Valley. Russell Bower, who had served during the last years of the conflict, returned

home to the Hamlin area and must have influenced many former soldiers to view this area. A fairly good number settled in future Albion township and became part of a veteran group that had Hamlin as a focal point for their activities for many years. Memorial Day and July 4th observances here held in the Bowers grove and a note in school records acknowledged a gift of a large flag from these men to be raised especially on those days. A strong fraternal feeling naturally existed among these veterans. A dozen are buried at the Hamlin cemetery.

With the end of the war came a renewed race for land settlement. The light, sandy soil of this valley made little impression of prospective settlers at that time, who were aware that Minnesota prairie lands were available. This valley provided a well used passage-way to that state. The white canvas covered wagons were many, all heading westward to

cross the Chippewa River near Durand, most heading north to Menomonie and then west for fairly easy travel.

Here in future Unity, A. J. Lyon and Wingad brothers lived along the west line, Jack Carter had located in Section 18, the Williams brothers in Section 10 and several English speaking families lived in the coming Brick school district. But all undeveloped land, and more, in this area, was about to undergo an influx of Norwegian immigration, these coulees with their steep hillsides would appeal to these people whose homeland was only 3% agricultural.

The southeastern part of this county had already experienced a heavy Norwegian settlement, their churches had been established, schools were being attended by youths in their twenties eager to learn English. Norway's transplants were enthusiastic about possibilities in this new land, so different from the old.

Land Acquisition

The early pioneer had one goal in view, some land and a home. To most emigrants from northern Europe that flooded the northwest, this objective and goal meant all the security they would need in this life on earth. Some had undergone nothing but war, governmental edicts and famines since birth. To attract new settlers into new, unbroken areas, Congress passed two acts, the Railroad Act, 1856-1864, and the Homestead Act, which took effect on January 1, 1863.

The first mentioned gave a qualifying railroad every other section of land for 10 miles on each side of their track. This was soon increased to twenty miles on account of early pre-emptions, and this land was to be sold to the first buyer at a price of not more than \$200 per quarter section of 160 acres, or \$1.25 per acre. Railroads adhered to this figure, the poorest sand acre in the Beef River Valley was purchased at the same price as the best land of the Red River Valley in North Dakota. The Western Wisconsin Railroad (WRR) had reached Tomah when outbreak of the Civil War halted expansion. At the end of the war, construction again was begun toward

Black River Falls with plans to cross the Chippewa River at Eau Claire and reach Hudson, which was accomplished after two years. The track skirted the pine forest edge, and Fairchild, Augusta and Fall Creek became trade centers because of the track. The rails reached Eau Claire in 1870.

The 1877 Tucker map clearly illustrates railroad holdings as of that year, twenty miles from the track includes land in sections 1, 9, and 3 of range 8, township 23, the whole of section 35, range 8, township 24. A line drawn through section 31 in Albion to section 15 in Hale marks the twenty mile radius on the west side of the WRR track.

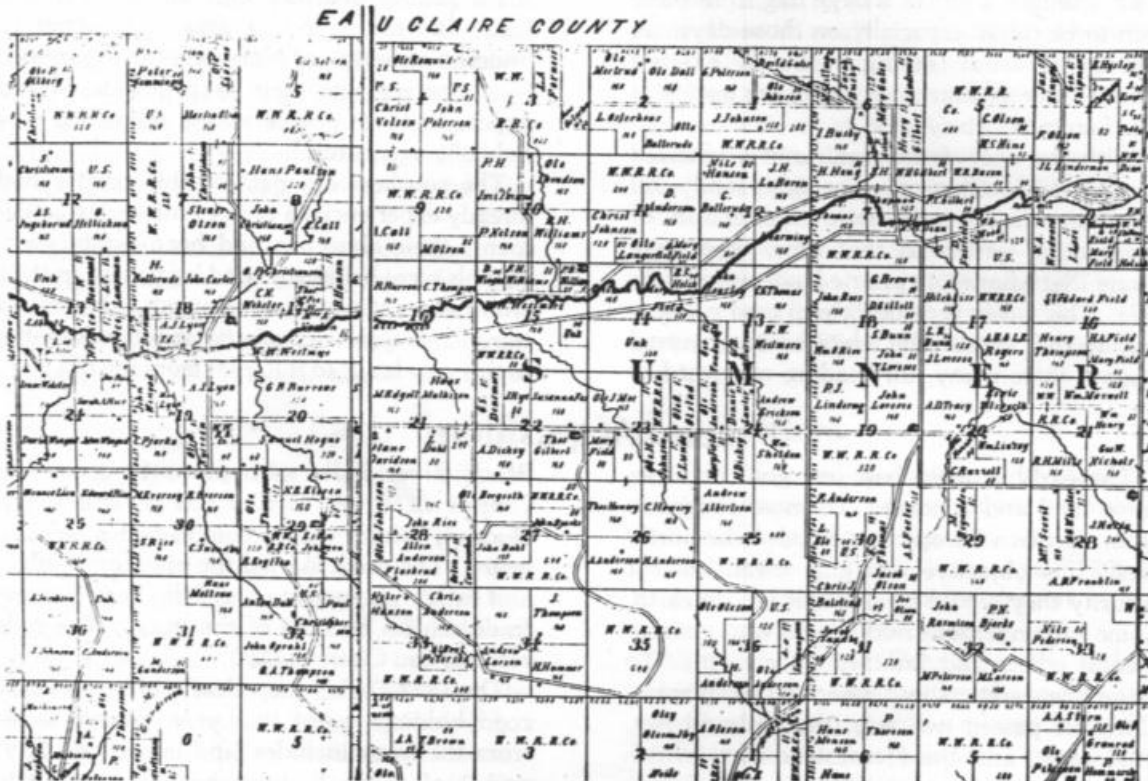
Railroads were not particularly concerned about their land disposal. Speculators roamed the frontier of a development on horseback and made a quick dollar on a good location, their price was usually \$400 on a \$200 purchase.

The Homestead Act was very popular as a settler could obtain a home site with no money at all except a \$15 fee paid after 5 years. The applicant had only to file his intentions, live thereon, cultivate and improve some land and

show some improvement on the property when an inspection was made during the fifth year. A \$15 fee was due at that time. All lands, excepting railroad property, was eligible for homesteading.

Even when homesteading, the settler had a long struggle. Many selected a living site near a spring, dug living space into some bank for

the first winter, left a wife and small children and worked in a lumber camp for \$8-12 per month until spring. Then to erect some sort of a shanty for the future, break the root filled new earth, plant a crop on a few acres, harvest it and take off for another winter that was equally hard on both man and wife. It was a hard life, but the land was theirs . . .



The 1877 Tucker map. The present Village of Strum is located in Sections 18 & 19 on the left. Note the schools in Sections 18, 15, 22 and 29.

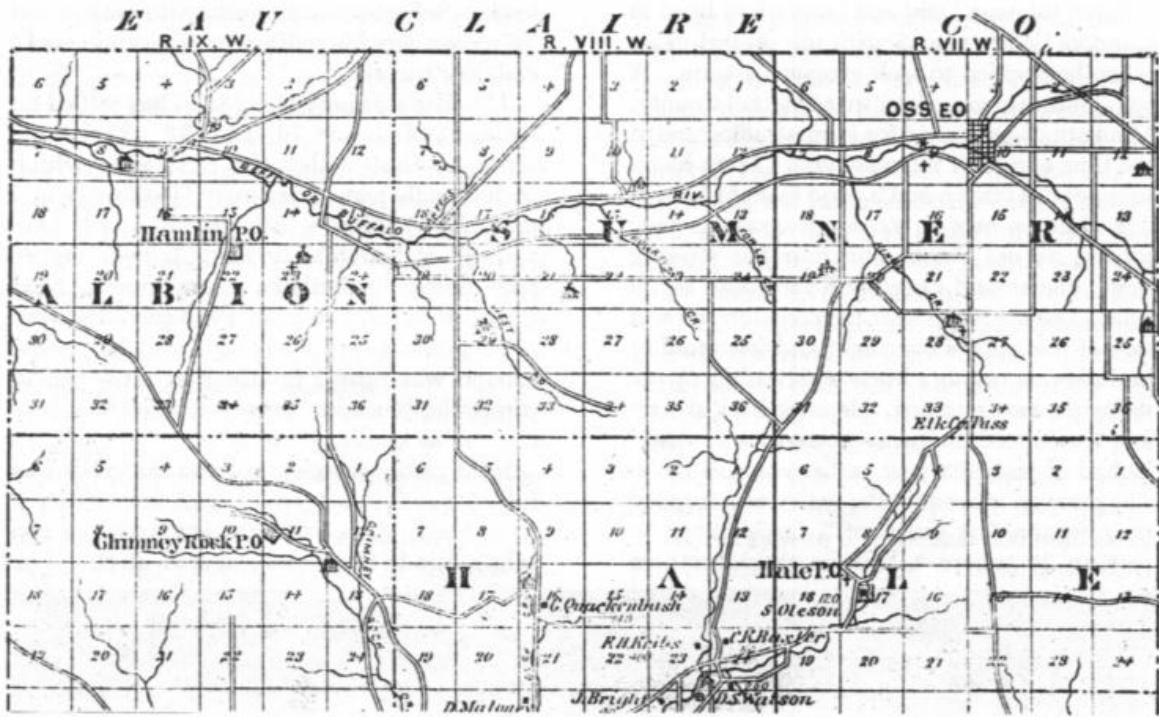
The Riviere Des Beauf (Beef) and The Bon Secours (Chippewa)

Geologists believe our river valley was a lake at one time with an outlet flowing west from the Mondovi area, following the Bear Creek valley and entering the Chippewa River upstream from Durand.

Explorers traveling the Mississippi during the 1700's wrote of the Riviere Des Beauf emptying into the Bon Secours at a mile above the present site of Alma. A note by Zeb M. Pike in the Wisconsin Historical Collections, Volume XVI mentions this as does the French

explorer La Seur in a report of his various travels on the upper Mississippi.

It seems the Chippewa River instead of flowing straight out into the Mississippi as at present, turned eastward at the present site of Nelson and followed the Wisconsin shore line past the present mouth of the Beef River and emptied into the Mississippi at a point just above Alma. Indians living along "the fathers of waters" had a legend of an unusual rainy season that seemed to have occurred about



This map is from the Historical Atlas of Wisconsin in 1878, but has many omissions.

1735, establishing high water marks remembered by them for over a century. It may have been at that time that the Chippewa overflowed and established its present channel.

One hundred years ago the old channel of the Chippewa was used to float saw logs cut

on its upper branches down the river into Beef Sloughs where they were gathered and prepared into large rafts for floating to lower Mississippi River saw mills. Over a period of 25 years, millions of feet of logs were handled in this manner.

The Norwegian Influx

Rumors of free land traveled through northern European countrysides during the mid-nineteenth century. It served as a main conversion topic among all classes of people, especially the poor, hardworking peasants who owned no land and whose livelihood depended on a landlord's crop. The landlord class, too, had an attentive ear because years of inherited holdings had greatly diminished individual holdings until it behooved many to look westward where they might have a new start. Norway was greatly affected by this rumor because the economic condition of its rural inhabitants was desparate and only a small percentage of the countryside permitted

enough agriculture to produce a stable living. Yet, government and the state church criticized anyone wishing to emigrate and several of the newspapers refused to print anything about "free" land, feeling such rumors were pure humbug.

In spite of this emigration continued. The 1850's show an annual move of 2,000 to 8,000 per year. After the American Civil War it rose to 10-15,000 annually. It dropped during the 1870's but rose to nearly 30,000 in 1882. The great majority came to the midwest, the post civil war period flooding Trempealeau County coulees and finally reached the Beef River Valley portion of range 8 in 1868.

Esten Johnson Dahl and family had lived in Cannon Valley near Sparta for several years when he decided to seek greener pastures. A son, John, told years later that Ottertail County, Minnesota was opened for homesteading and at the time was their intended goal. Esten had a fully loaded wagon and a good team of horses. The children herded a cow alongside as they moved across ridges and marshes passing Blair, Pigeon and Osseo in a three day travel time. They camped near the creek on the east side of this village overnight and John told of his father mounting a horse and heading up the valley the next morning. He came back shortly and announced their travels were over. Land he had appraised a year earlier was available. The caravan moved up the valley and stopped their wagon just south of a large spring in section 29 where a terrific thunderstorm

broke. Refuge was taken under the wagon and he remembers his mother praying this would end their travels.

The date was June 18, 1868. They settled on the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 29, T24, R8. They were alone in that valley the first year which undoubtedly was a busy one. First there was a matter of shelter which meant a trip to a sawmill at Fairchild or Eau Claire to secure pine lumber for building a small home. Next came a shed for their team and a cow. Potatoes were planted, wild hay was put up, some ground was turned for the first time, not to forget the blueberry crop which leant a blue haze to the knolls.

Wild game was plentiful and the creek was full of trout. A boy could catch one or fifty if he wished. One fact was implanted in son John's mind, to be remembered at 80. The



In interesting view of a well known area in Johnson Valley. The date of this photo is either 1901 or 1902. The Esten Johnson Dahl farmstead lies directly in front of the camera, rented at that time by son John J. Dahl. Across Spring Creek was the home of brother Gilbert Dahl. Just past his windmill we have a glimpse of Nels Kleven's home. And over Esten's blacksmith shop is the white Johnson Valley School. Three things date the picture as prior to 1903. The school had no entry shelter until that year. Gilbert Dahl's barn burned that year and was replaced by the present hip-roof structure. The size of the pines around the house is also a clue. The valley was named in Esten's honor as he was the first settler.

scarcity of timber had been evident on their three day travel, but the Beef River Valley and their home coulee had no trees, except for a very few willows and alders along the river or creeks. They learned that Indians burned the hills regularly to insure blueberry crops. The natives were of the peaceful Winnebago tribe whose winter village was south on the Black River. A couple of families lived that first summer in the upper end of the valley. They called occasionally for a loaf of bread, always reciprocating with a pan of meat. There were actually few Indians in this area.

Esten Johnson Dahl's family soon learned that their closest post office was at Hamlin, that A. J. Lyons and the Wingads lived to the northwest of their home and P. B. Williams to the northeast. Several of the English speaking families had pre-empted land in sections 22 and 23 further east.

The first winter was without incident except for a constant scrounging for wood. John remembers seeing and hearing a wolf atop their animal shed one cold, moonlit winter night. Then a small son died and the father made a trip back to the Cannon Valley cemetery for interment.

Local Government

During the first decade of settlement, 1857-1867, the local area had been governed by the town board of Sumner which included all lands north of township line 24 north, in ranges 7, 8 and 9, later Sumner, Unity and Albion townships respectively.

In 1862 residents of Hamlin formed the Town of Chase in honor of young David Chase who had been killed at the battle of Shiloh. That town organization seems to have faded away, as only part of an 1863 assessment roll remains, and range 9 residents created the township of Albion in 1869. The town of Sumner assessment roll for 1870, however, includes range 9 as if Albion did not exist. Perhaps some agreement had been made about a tax division.

One can easily understand a reason for this separation. The Sumner town board had a representative from range 9, and travel to the

One early spring evening two men walked down from the west ridge. They had been looking for land, were tired and hungry, happy to learn the family was Norwegian and delighted to know the whole valley was empty. The Flatens settled on the next quarter section up the valley and before many months had passed, Engebret Pederson chose land above them. Over the ridge in what was called west valley, Even Evenson and Anton Dahl, both of the Ronglien family, had homesteaded. Across the river in Carter valley, Johannes Christianson had built a home. Over the ridge in Big Creek, a settlement from Rindal, Norway had begun in 1867.

1869 had seen several Norwegian families locate in this river valley, but 1870 brought many more with a result that about all except the hilliest forty acre pieces of land were pre-empted. Very few had any equipment or cash but they were an ambitious, industrious people with high hopes about possibilities in this new land. Various area valleys had a high number of settlers from certain "bygds", or localities, in Norway, the reasons for this are discussed elsewhere in this telling.

Osseo area to consult about a township problem demanded not only travel time but a matter of communication in order that a proper official could be contacted. Residents of range 8 (present Unity) had received generous attention from Sumner voters, once settlement had become stabilized. P. B. Williams had served as both supervisor and chairman, Esten Johnson Dahl and Lars Dahl had terms as supervisors and Even Evenson had a term as town clerk and supervisor.

Evenson was supervisor in 1877 and possibly instrumental in obtaining a \$75 appropriation to consult a river bridge between sections 15 and 16 (red bridge). Early that same year he obtained favorable action and laid out the Carter Creek road, now County D, over the ridge into Big Creek area. Its southern point began at his north farm line, about a mile south of the present village, and a

dozen years later became the main street of Strum. Evenson, of course, was interested in providing travel rights for any member of the Big Creek settlement that could be induced to join his church group and aid in building a house of worship, a happening that took place a few months later.

1877 must have been a busy year for several local residents. In January the Carter Creek road to Big Creek was laid out. Then in February Evenson's group of Norwegians formed the St. Paul's Lutheran congregation, circulated a petition that raised \$600 and built their church. A. J. Lyons donated land for the building and cemetery. Evenson was secretary and largest contributor. At the first annual meeting he paid an indebtedness totaling \$800. During the fall of that year the citizens of range 8 came to a decision about separating from the Town of Sumner. Voters of Sumner had been very considerate about granting official representation to the sparsely populated western half of the township, but again there was the matter of travel and communication. Anyway, on April 2, 1878, voters of range 8 assembled at the Howery school (later the site of the Brick school) for their first annual meeting. Simon Olson who would eventually become Trempealeau County register of deeds was elected clerk, and his clear, well written minutes reveal that \$200 was raised for roads and bridges, \$200 for incidental expenses, and \$50 for support of the poor. Polls closed at sundown and P. B. Williams was chosen 1st chairman, Lars Dahl and Ole J. Moe supervisors, Simon Olson clerk, Even Evenson treasurer, and Ole Thomasgaard was elected assessor.

The name of the township must have been chosen at a pre-election meeting. It is a short, interesting episode that should bear mention. Dennis Lawler and P. B. Williams were the first two settlers north of T24, R8. The former felt his surname should be used as the name for the new municipality. Someone must have felt that P. B. should be privileged to have a choice

because he suggested the name of his home town in Maine. Straws were drawn and P. B. won. Hence we have Unity. Somewhere there is a note that Noah Comstock of Arcadia served as advisor for this township organization and refereed the straw tally.

Norwegian settlers held all administrative posts of the new township except chairman. They outnumbered their Yankee neighbors and the matter of securing voting rights after just a short residence may be puzzling. It appears the act of securing land was a step toward suffrage. A letter written by C. E. Wenberg, the first Norwegian settler in Chimney Rock, had an enlightening sentence confirming this. He arrived in 1869 and cast his first vote for U. S. Grant as President in 1872. Wenberg tells that his first paper was given for free with an understanding that "my vote would be given as recommended by he who gave the paper." In any event these new citizens were highly impressed by these laws that gave them authority to vote and manage their own government. In my files is a letter from a new arrival that had been sent back to relatives in the old country, wherein he tells of many differences in this new land. "Here" he says, "if we don't like the man in office, we vote another in his place." Simple. By 1880 all officers were Norwegian with Even Evenson chairman.

These people took a keen interest in running the township. The first recording of a vote came in 1884 when 119 were cast. Later, 134 ballots were given and the high was 160 in 1892. Remember that only men voted. Ole Thomasgaard succeeded P. B. Williams after a couple of years. Otto Langerfield, M. Imislund and Even Evenson also served as chairman in succeeding years. The Howery school was used for a meeting place until 1887 when Finstad's hall (the 2nd floor of the blacksmith shop) took over. In 1894 the Temperance Hall became the home of Unity for the next 85 years.

That First Assessment (1878)

Big Ole Thomasgaard had been elected as Unity assessor at that first town meeting in 1878, the first of many terms as an official of this township. Incidentally he was also the first of the local immigrants to obtain full citizenship. Thomasgaard's records are clearly recorded and show the township to be sparsely settled. Over sixty 40-acre parcels of land were assessed as railroad property although many of these parcels may have been in the process of sale. Speculators were buying at the railroad price of \$1.25 per acre and easily doubling any investment. Forty acres of land usually carried an assessment of \$50. A house added \$300-400 to this amount. Actually some new settlers spent the first year or two in dugouts.

Personal property was recorded in great detail. A horse was valued at \$40-75. Peter Hanson and Hans Mathison each had 5. Chairman Williams was a horse dealer, he had 12. Williams also had the most meat cattle, 14. Andrew Call was next with 13. Several settlers also had swine, usually 4 or 5, but Jack Carter had 7 and civil war veteran Sam Hogue was assessed for 12 hogs. Sleighs and wagons were counted. Few had more than one of each but M. P. Imislund had 3. Three reed organs were assessed, one at \$50 and 2 at \$75. The highest assessment was charged to J. LeBarron at \$650. Andrew Call had \$5 less. The total of all personal property was \$25,460.00. Real estate totaled \$91,325.00 for a grand total of \$116,785.00.

An interesting comparison of farm domestic animal population is worth some space.

Year	Horses	Sheep	Swine	Cattle
1878	148	147	145	491
1900	415	436	469	969
1936	not assessed	885	169	2279
1971	not assessed	53	204	3717

Hog prices bottomed at \$.02 per pound in 1936. No wonder farmers quit hogs. The 1971 sheep count of 53 is hard to believe. There were only two teams of horses used on farms

that year although several were pastured. Some change.

Unity citizens had an opportunity to vote on the county seat controversy that first year and delivered a majority favoring Whitehall. The following spring Thomas Howery presented a resolution at the annual meeting opposing the borrowing of any money to build a county courthouse. It was adopted. P. B. Williams was not a candidate for chairman in 1880 and Even Evenson succeeded to that post.

The first resolution concerning the restraining of cattle from roaming at will was made by P. B. Williams in 1881 and was adopted, although the minutes mentioned a "divided house." Then in the fall of 1881 came the first real calamity to hit the fledging township.

Unity was sued for \$5,500.00. It seems A. D. Moon was freighting a load of foods from the Augusta depot to R. P. Goddard's store in Eleva some time in late 1881. A bridge of some sort must have existed over the river near the St. Paul's Church because Mr. Moon, wagon, team, and the whole load of goods crashed through the structure. Mr. Goddard asked for \$500 damage but Moon served notice that his loss would come to ten times that amount. A special meeting was called of all taxpayers to meet at the Howery School. \$300 was voted to obtain a good lawyer with the authority to spend \$750 if needed. Goddard quickly settled for \$250, but Moon held out for a couple of years. Finally an order shows he accepted \$187.50. Attorneys fees were \$15. It seems a little over \$100 was spent on plank and bridge work in December, 1881. The township bought 8,000 feet of planking from Bennet's Mill to be hauled and piled on Clement Thompson's farm, hauling to be let to the lowest bidder. Esten Johnson was awarded the job at \$4.25 per thousand feet. The lumber bill came to \$43.92.

Ole Thomasgaard succeeded Evenson as chairman and served off and on for the next 25 years. A most unusual report was made by town officials at the spring annual meeting in 1882. No poor fund tax had to be raised

because "Unity had no poor persons." In 1883 we find \$125 was again appropriated for a bridge over the river near P. B. Williams' home. Sumner had spent \$75 for a bridge at this crossing in 1877. Also, the second resolution regarding control of stray livestock was presented by Williams, a problem that was discussed at several later meetings in the 1880's. Barbed wire had not yet been introduced.

Came 1884 and the first indication that Thor Holden and Ole Kittleson were in business. Per Bonkrud's blacksmith shop later bought by C. Finstad was also doing well. All buildings were on the present Woodland Drive, except Holden, whose lot was across the street at the west end of Woodland. Kittleson received a postal appointment in February, 1885, a move welcomed by local settlers as now a long walk to Bower's post office at Hamlin was not necessary. The shingle on Kittleson's store let people know they were at "Strum", a sign that needed repainting twice (see "Names" later in this book). His building stands at 313 Woodland Drive.

In 1886 the price on wheat dropped to below a dollar a bushel and hard times continued for two or three years. A move to buy a pole driver for building a bridge lost at the annual meeting, but later that year a most interesting entry in the clerk's minute book appears. "Tollef Olson, a poor person, was sent back to Norway". Cost was \$60. Bridge work in 1887 cost \$329 but there is no indication where this amount was spent. 135 votes were cast at the spring election and voters decided to hold their next meeting at Finstad's Hall.

Good news came from up the river. Osseo citizens had induced N. C. Foster to build a railroad spur to their village. The first train came into their town on June 30, 1887. Six carloads of produce were unloaded and more was promised. The name of the railroad, the Fairchild and Mississippi, had all the indications that it would be extended down the valley.

Township authorities had been busy. 118 votes were cast at the spring, 1890 meeting. P. B. Williams offered a Canada thistle

resolution and a "particular bastard case" was left to the town board. In 1891 the vote rose to 134 and the poor appropriation rose from \$50 to \$150. The growing town must have impressed the board to provide some safe-keeping equipment. A safe was bought at a cost of \$48.70, freight included. It followed the residences of various town clerks as they served through the years until it reached and served E. N. Kleven for his many terms. It was very heavy so when the present sheriff's wife remodeled a room, she covered the unsightly thing. Future posterity take note, it is still there.

In 1892 153 votes were cast, the depot was built and the community had a telegraph wire connected to the outside world. Not much is recorded in 1893 but the next year brought 160 voters to the Unity annual meeting that was now held at the newly built Temperance Hall, the township home for the next 80 years. The river bridge finally received a major overhaul. Sivert Rekstad supervised the job and Clement Thompson bought the old planks for \$15.00. The tax roll totalled \$2,406.09 of which \$600.00 was township tax. 177 votes were cast in 1895. A move to buy a grader lost and records show that men working on their poll tax were credited \$1.25 for working a ten hour day. It should be mentioned that Unity had been divided into 4 road districts with a supervisor and timekeeper for each. Reports were due in Demember of each year. The town board rented a grader from Sumner at \$4 per day until they finally purchased one from the C. Aultman Co. for \$130.25 in 1897. That was also the year Dr. Torkelson moved in, records showing his appointment as health officer of the township.

About this time, 1888-89, farmers had decided to recognize the cow as having a future in their plans. Two small buildings were erected just beyond Finstads blacksmith shop to serve as a creamery. It was a co-operative effort, but after a year or two the business closed its doors, only to be reopened through the private efforts of Kittleson's new partner, Hans Willumson. Feeling the creamery served a need, he bought cream,

hired a buttermaker and put the business on a sound footing. Willumson then called a meeting and gave the operation back to the original owners who reorganized and ran it successfully until it was liquidated over 80 years later.

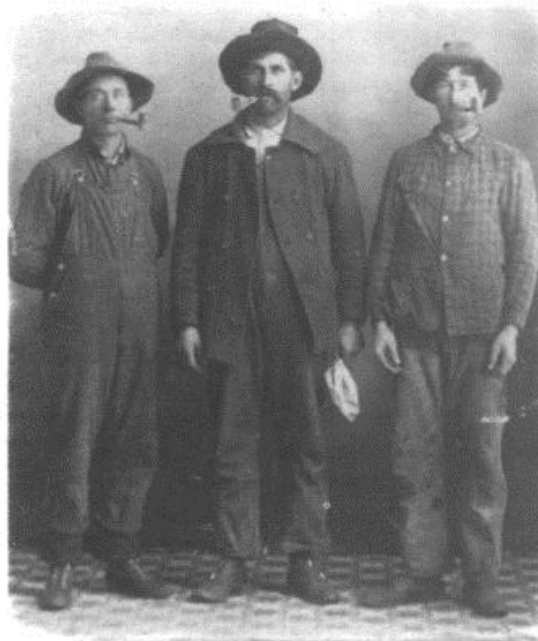
The annual town meeting in 1889 appropriated \$250.00 to build a new bridge at the St. Paul's crossing, then amended the action for lower bids. It was this year that Ole Kittleson oiled up his paint brush for a final adornment. He crossed out "Tilden" and reapplied "Strum" on his post office shingle. (see story on Names). The Fairchild & Mississippi Railroad, now operating as the Sault Ste. Marie and Southern, had decided the Beef River Valley needed a railroad and reached Carter's Crossing during the last days of December, 1889. Tracks reached Eleva a few days later and Mondovi later the next year. There was actually no village at its present location when the rails were laid.

Someone influenced the railroad officials to lay two loading spurs and received immediate use loading hay and livestock. The men responsible for these shipments are unknown but the activity prompted N. C. Foster to unload a stock of lumber during the next summer with Sivert Rekstad in charge. A town began springing up. Holden moved his small store building to the present Robbe Store site, Kittleson & Willumson erected a new business place near the present Post Office building, and Dahl and Clemenson began operating a general store on what is now the corner of 5th Avenue and Birch Street. In a matter of two or three years the Northern Grain and Seed Company had erected an elevator. John Clemenson was manager and the Cargill Company followed with a like facility with Ole Thomasgaard as operator. What had once been a couple of sandy wheel ruts leading to Carter's Crossing was now a busy street of a growing village.

Pioneer Life

Early settlers in most all areas of the midwest had a tough life. Most of their early homes were hastily constructed with pine boards usually and usually had two small rooms lined with paper to hold out drafts. Heating fuel was scarce, especially in this area. A load of alders or willow which took all day to gather was consumed hurriedly in sub-zero temperatures. Men worked in the pineries during winter months and left families alone until spring.

Medical aid was nonexistent. Old records show that diphtheria raged during the winter 1877-78. Four children of Hans and Dorothea Hammer, all they had, died during the Christmas season. It was the first interment at St. Paul's cemetery. Pastor C. J. Helsem told of conducting a funeral service at Chimney Rock where three children and a worn out mother were laid in the same grave. Anton Dahl, an early settler in Rognlief Valley, endured increasing abdominal pains for several years. Dr. Bodum of Blair described future symptoms and predicted death for his patient within a short time. Doctors had yet to



L-R Nysven, Mark Rice, Helfred Matson. This picture was taken about 1900 just as the men came out of the woods, finished for the season. They worked near Winter, Wisconsin.



Annual delivery of Champion Binders, H. A. Field, agent. In the background can be seen the soon to be completed Colpits home which was built by Hans Willumson and still stands at 205 Elm St. The white house barely visible over the roof of the implement shed is the Carl Frodahl home. It was later moved to the entrance to the park and was torn down just a few years ago. The Temperance Hall can be seen in the background at the right. This picture was probably taken about 1895. It is probably the oldest multi-building picture of our town.

learn of an appendectomy.

Much bartering took place those early days as cash was scarce. Interest was 10% on loans, subtracted at the borrowing date. If payment was made by bank notes another 10% for exchange was subtracted.

Norwegians were good woodsmen and had little difficulty obtaining work in the pineries. Pay was up to \$15 per month those first years, bed and board included. Work began at daylight and ended at dusk. Compensation insurance was unheard of. Even Holte's brother was killed by a falling branch on a Christmas Day. The woods boss bemoaned the time necessary to remove the body. It was a harsh life.

After a shelter had been provided the first objective of an 1870 settler was to break the virgin soil. As mentioned earlier there was little timber because Indians had burned the hills periodically to insure a good blueberry crop. C. E. Wenberg, the first Chimney Rock settler, made a special mention of hilltops and

knolls having a blue haze when this crop was ripe. The small brush was not too difficult to clear. Two span of oxen hitched to a breaking plow and tended by two men would turn an acre a day. A seed bed for wheat was usually planned because it was the only cash crop.

Markets were far away prior to 1870 but the Western Wisconsin Railroad (WWR) reached Eau Claire that year and provided Beef River farmers with a one day trip. Return trips were risky as hold-ups occurred frequently. Settlers would travel in a group if possible. The amount of wheat raised was stupendous when one considers the equipment used. First tales tell of men using a cradle to down the grain. Just about everyone learned to tie the sheaves and shock, afterwhich came stacking so the grain would cure. Then some small hand-fed separators were used to thresh the wheat. Reapers had been in use since 1835 and undoubtedly the New Englanders had these implements. Esten Johnson was the first Norwegian to obtain one. Horsepower sweeps

furnished power for threshing machines with steam making its debut about the mid 1880's. The Flaten brothers owned the first of these engines. Elsewhere is pictured Horace Fields' binder delivery day in Strum. This piece of equipment came into use during the early

1890's. Nels Kleven was an early owner.

According to the Tucker map of 1877, Sumner township, which included Unity at that date, had over 4800 acres of wheat that year. Only 47½ acres of rye were reported, and 68 acres of corn.



This photo dates back before 1897 and after 1890. The railroad came into Strum in December 1889. We see a box car on the track at the Northern Grain elevator and a faint line at the right indicates its roadbed westward. The St. Paul's Church was drastically remodelled in 1902. Here it is still untouched. Note at the right the first school was a one room affair. A second was built on in 1897. Only 6 little buildings are on the west side of main street. Three homes are visible: Carl Frodahl's residence, later moved to the park and torn down. Hans Willumson's residence, now 205 Elm St., and the Kenyon house, which stood where Hulbergs store is now located. The long building furthest east is the Cargill elevator before a head house was constructed. The headhouse on the Northern Grain elevator hides the residence on the Skovbraaten property. The small, dark building at the east edge of the Frodahl residence is the Temperance Hall. The large, white building on Main Street is the Central House hotel. In the distance are the faint outlines of Nysven's, Kleven's, Olson's and Nick Rognlien's farm buildings.

The Coming of the Railroad

Present day youth have a bare memory of the railroad. To them it is an abandoned grade that provides a short snowmobile ride during winter and is intended as a bike trail some summer soon. Time is not too long passed when meeting the train four times a day was a daily adventure for several elderly people, not to mention salesmen calling on local merchants, real estate men buying and selling land or relatives arriving for a visit. In fact, almost any traveling required use of railroad service.

The Beef River Valley was handicapped for some thirty years without a railroad. Farm

produce was delivered for shipment at Eau Claire and Augusta or at the Green Bay line in the Trempealeau valley. Herding cattle twenty miles was difficult so it was small wonder that wheat provided what cash a settler in this valley could produce. Attempts to have the Green Bay line build a spur up Elk Creek Valley, Chimney Rock and into Eleva, then westward to Durand met with no response from railroad moguls. Then in 1886 some influential men in Sumner and Osseo sold N. C. Foster, a Fairchild lumber baron, on building a spur to that village. They pledged a township bond issue amounting to \$10,000

payable in gold at the Augusta bank, interest at 6% as enticement. Foster organized the high sounding Fairchild & Mississippi Railroad Company and Sumner citizens were promised one seat on the board of directors. Ed Matchett was promptly elected to fill that position in 1888.

The first train rolled into Osseo from Sault Ste Marie on June 30, 1887. Six cars were filled with outgoing freight and more were promised. Foster had secured a mail contract and planned two trains per day.

It was a start and when the line continued its building program down our valley two years later, the name had been changed. It made no difference. The rails were greeted with great enthusiasm because it meant a closer market for any produce and the value of land rose whenever this service was available. It was a great year for the Beef River Valley.

Carter's Crossing was reached during the last days of December, 1889. The assessment roll of that year shows A. J. Lyons owning about all the land on which Strum now lies.

The St. Paul's church, Holden and Kittleson's stores, a blacksmith shop and two small creamery buildings were located north of the river. It is often said that the town moved but such is not the case. Holden moved his small store unto the present Robbe Store lot. Kittleson, with a new partner, Hans Willumson, erected a new store about at the present Post Office site. These two merchants were the town, but many people became interested in the possibilities at once.

Eleva had its first train a few days later and held a day long celebration. Mondovi held its observance later in 1890 and provided a large trade area for the new line which had been sold to the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railroad.

No one who worked with the grain business is now alive and no records are available, but William Kromroy, who came here in 1919, commented that even at that later date he had dispatched 14 carloads of produce in one day and 30 per week was not an uncommon number to be shipped from Strum.

Election Returns By Wire

The coming of the railroad spur down this river valley brought an interesting convenience - telegraph service. All depot agents were operators and the single wire was an unbelievable connection with the outside world. Market prices of farm produce were available daily, messages to relatives could be sent and received and watches could be checked for correct time. Best of all, in 1896 the depot agent let it be known that general election returns would be received the same evening, if anyone was interested.

Interested! Many years later an elderly man told of that evening. He was a young boy at the time, had heard of McKinley running against a many named Bryant and begged and received permission to accompany his dad and a couple of uncles for a most interesting and important evening.

The depot was full, he recalled. Besides village men a contingent from every valley seemed present. A scoreboard was up and

after every clicking of a little machine the agent handed a vote to be posted. Ohio, Illinois, Maine, Virginia . . . the list of states reporting was like a fairy tale to this interested boy. Long after midnight came the word: McKinley was the winner. All agreed the service was unbelievable.

All headed for home and the boy remembers it was a cold, moonlit early morning. He was of the Johnson Valley group that would walk south and east. First to part were several from Rognlien valley. Then a mile east came a parting at the Johnson Valley corner. GOP enthusiasm ran high and one fellow suggested the 15-20 men present give nine hurrahs for McKinley before parting. All agreed and nine hurrahs rang out, waking every dog in the valley that cold, still morning, and maybe a few wives. Everyone felt it had been a fine evening except Elland Flaten. He was a Democrat.

1900-1950

The turn of the century marked quite a change in the thirty year old community. The church, blacksmith and creamery were located north of the river but all other business endeavors were located south of that stream near the tracks. The Carter Creek Road, laid out by Evenson, became the main street of Strum and village activity was beginning a couple decades of growth.

Rural Free Delivery of mail came in 1900. O. E. Hogue was the carrier and he traveled north to Norseville and Nix Corner, postal stations at that time. Rural residents had much apprehension about free delivery the first years but this feeling soon abated. In 1905 Ben Borreson began serving route 2 south of town.

Around 1900 the Modern Woodmen, and insurance lodge, were active in this area and sold residents on building a hall large enough

for community-wide meetings and events. The Temperance Society building was small and that group forbade dancing or most entertainment. The MWA hall was built and served the community for over fifty years. It seemed to be refinanced and under new management about every fifth year. (see MWA Hall).

Growth of the village affected membership of the St. Paul's church. In 1902 a major remodeling and expansion was done. Sivert Rekstad was the prime mover of this job.

About that time records show that steam engines used by threshermen were crashing through bridges in the township. The town board passed a resolution ordering these operators to carry heavy planks when traveling town roads which crossed streams. No sooner had this been posted when Mark Rice and his Minneapolis steamer fell through the river bridge, necessitating a major overhaul of that



Fred Lyons and crew putting the finishing touches on his new elevator in 1904. The Northern Grain & Seed elevator is on the right.

span.

In 1904 Fred Lyon completed his grain elevator and Strum had four such operators buying grain, hay and straw. Freighting in big cities depended on horse power and required great quantities of such farm produce to feed the teams.

At this time nearly all small towns had some sort of telephone connection. T. C. Johnson's hardware store had a phone hooked onto the Osseo-Mondovi line that could provide an emergency call. In 1907 the telephone company hung lines throughout the countryside and everyone began to know their neighbors' whereabouts at all times, besides having a second connection to the outside world.



The Beef River Bridge, about 1910.

During 1905 John J. Dahl erected two brick buildings on the west side of main street. In the fall a bank was organized and opened for business early the next year. It was a most welcome service to the whole area. Also, the new druggist moved in next door.

In 1907 the town business men promoted a July 4th celebration. Druggist Grover Pace was parade marshal and a local men's band furnished music during the day.

Another bit of tax money was spent on the river bridge in 1910. The steel cylinders were sunk into the Beef another foot or two and that strengthened the span. Times were fairly good and there were no complaints about various bridge expenditures.

The first automobile rolled into town in 1909. No one could foresee how this noisy, smelly invention would change transportation,

living habits, taxation, and, well, would affect about everything about the whole nation. Henry and Nels Robbe were the proud owners of a two cylinder Buick sporting a chain drive that would clog most anytime. Roads were horrible, the engine had little power and any grass in mid-road would result in a call for help.



July 4, 1907. Grover Pace was Uncle Sam. The bass drum says "Osseo Band" on it.

Auto owners everywhere were demanding better highways, government authorities at all levels were besieged with petitions for action regarding this. Unity had spent considerable sums for construction of stone bridge abutments but all were so narrow no two vehicles could pass simultaneously. Very few road beds had any gravel or crushed rock for a foundation.

The county board appointed Ed Matchett, an Osseo contractor, as their first county highway commissioner in 1912. Appropriations were small and the first inventory of highway equipment made in 1916 was very limited. However, expenditures for roads and equipment kept rising for many decades.

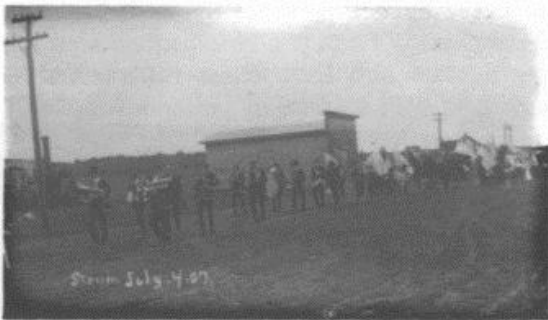
There can be some debate about the beginning of fire protection for village residents. An artesian well in front of the T. M. Olson building served as a watering place for horses, the means of transportation at the time. At least three large cisterns were built and this well provided the water to fill each for use in event of fire. One was located on the corner of Elm St. and 2nd Avenue, another on Maple and 5th Avenue and the third somewhere on 6th Avenue. Fred Lyons was the driving force

behind the purchase of a hand pumper sometime around 1912.

A fire of major proportion for a small village took place on the evening of December 2, 1914. Sixty-five years later Clarence Knutson vividly recalled that evening. It began in J. A. Call's building next to the depot. The alarm brought men and equipment immediately, he recalled. The blaze was about under control when the artesian well went dry! Another water source was obtained only to have some firemen cut the nozzle off the hose in a smokey room. After that the flames consumed five wooden frame buildings and was stopped by the two story brick structure belonging to T. M. Olson. J. A. Call was the first to rebuild. Seven places of business now occupy the burned over area.

Three local men formed an agency handling Dodge automobiles in 1914. A year later H. George Peterson bought his partners interests and secured the Ford agency from Fred Lyons. He and his family operated the business for the next forty years.

A new creamery building was erected by the farmers in 1912. It was located next to the railroad track in the east end of town and operated there for 65 years. Paul Moltau was president at that time.



Another scene from the 1907 4th of July parade. The building belonged to Sever Rekstad. The Marsh (now Skovbraaten) Home is in the background. The steam engine is a center crank Case and was owned by Mark Rice.

In 1915 an Independence contractor erected the two story, four classroom school building on the north side of the river and after completing it was given a contract to build the present Immanuel Lutheran church, at the time

known as the Norwegian Lutheran Synod. The cost of this structure was \$20,000.

World War I began in August, 1914. In 1917 the United States entered the fray. Several young men from this area enlisted and fought in muddy trenches. The war ended November 11, 1918.

For many years there had been much agitation to end the sale of alcoholic beverages in this country. Temperance unions had been active for 40 years in this area and were strong supporters of the Volstead Act named for the North Dakota congressman. The 18th amendment was finally passed and became effective on January 20, 1920 with states to decide the enforcement policies. Although several local municipalities granted no traffic or alcoholic beverages, this prohibitive amendment resulted in a sprouting of beer joints and an occasional still for manufacture of cheap alcohol. With it also came lawlessness.

In 1919 the mighty Beef flexed its early spring muscles. With the winter ice about to go a warm rain speeded the flood and the usually placid, winding stream swept the ten year old bridge down river with a roar. Records show bank loans were immediately made, contracts let, and a 90 foot span with overhead bridge-work of riveted steel was installed. It was the 6th such bridge job at that place and cost \$8,000. It stood until it was removed in June, 1979.

Two buildings went up on the east side of main street during the early 1920's. Ed Thomasgaard had his Liberty Hotel ready for occupancy in 1920 and Otto Rognlien moved into his new drugstore a short time later. Dr. L. R. Svoma has had an office in the hotel building for many years. Gary Monson operated a tavern in the Rognlien building.

Cheese manufacturing had its beginning about 1922 and K & L Oil Company erected a service garage in 1923. Otherwise there was no major change about the town.

The press for better roads was continuous. No major change had been made about snow removal during winter months. The policy was to hire a county-owned caterpillar snow plow to clear blocked highways prior to spring

thaws. Owners were putting their autos on blocks as late as 1927-28, about the time that main county trunks received some winter maintenance.

Business was fairly good for the farmer in rural Wisconsin during the mid 1920's. A county agricultural agent had been hired and one of his first programs was an introduction to alfalfa hay. Local merchants were doing well and overflow crowds crowded the village on Saturday evenings to shop and enjoy the weekly concerts by the ladies band. Things were not so well on the national scene, however. President Calvin C. Coolidge refused to sign a bill authorizing an increase of about \$4.00 per month pension for the fast diminishing number of Civil War veterans, saying "it would break the country." He finished his term and Herbert Hoover succeeded him.

No supervision governing security investments could ever pass Congress in these years preceding the Great Depression, being always defeated or delayed by a group of Senators crying infringement on free enterprise. The over burdened stock market enjoyed its Black Tuesday on October 24, 1929. Banks began closing a year later. These institutions had been liquidating farm loans for several years but as there were no other lending agencies these attempts moved slowly. The local bank held off until September 29, 1931. It was a hectic day. Autos would drive into town at high speed, skid to a dusty stop and the driver would run to the bank door where a signed sheet told all. There were no demonstrations, but merely a sober assessment and a "now what?" attitude. In the days that followed just ordinary business was difficult. Coins were hard to find and credit was a questionable topic.

Business slowed drastically in 1932. A man's wages dipped to \$.15-.25 per hour. Butterfat at the creamery brought a farmer \$.15 per pound. Shipments of cattle could bring little above freight costs. Butchered hogs were purchased at \$.02 per pound.

1933 can be said to have been the low year economically here in this community. Tax records were of high delinquency, living

seemed to be hand to mouth. Work was scarce and business activity seemed to concern necessities only. It was the year Unity Creamery officials decided to burn wood instead of coal and gave farmer patrons an opportunity of furnishing 10 cords of wood for which they were paid \$2.50 per cord, delivered. Patrons were happy for this decision. H. George Peterson was a sound business man and was an elected director of a newly organized bank at Eau Claire. His Ford agency sold far over 100 new cars in 1929. In 1933 he sold four. Added to this blue picture was a drought, the worst the oldest settler could remember. Many farmers able to afford the expense trucked their young cattle to northern pastures where they existed on marsh grass and leaves. A note relating the problems of the town board during these years certainly bears mention. Jim Olson, town patrolman, told of waiting several months for a \$75 labor payment. Unity had borrowed \$400 from the Farmers Bank at Osseo prior to the local closing. When the upriver bank failed to open, the Unity account was moved to Whitehall. Later the township transferred their business to the newly formed American Bank & Trust at Eau Claire. Olson finally was paid.



A close look at this picture indicates all four grain elevators and the brick bank and drug store buildings which means this picture was taken 1905 or later. No telephone poles are visible downtown indicating the picture was taken before 1907.

Roosevelt had defeated Hoover in the 1932 presidential election and took office as President on March 4, 1933. There was immediate action. All banks received orders to "close" their doors. The moratorium, labelled as a



An aerial shot taken about 1940, judging by the cars.

"bank Holiday", lasted a week or ten days until a quick examination had taken place. Some remained closed while several small banks in this area merged after a time. Others opened with depositor restrictions that were lifted after a few months. In June the FDIC Act was passed and a sort of confidence restored.

Here in Wisconsin a \$25,000,000 issue of script was proposed. Cities where banks had failed had ordered such issues printed with future redeemable dates. It was later learned that up to 10% were never presented for payment.

The community was certainly not prospering. Unity creamery was paying about 60 cents a hundred for milk, butter was 18 cents per pound, oats were 14 cents, heavy hens 14 cents per pound. The Chicago market quoted eggs at 9 cents per dozen. At times there was no quote on either wheat or barley.

The summer of 1933 moved into late fall with a blue economic outlook. The unvoiced

question on most everyone's lips seemed to be "what now?". Bank closings had eliminated cash reserves for many elderly. Work was scarce and any wages for the able bodied were very low. The so-called brain trust in Washington had been working. A fireside chat by the President had stressed the importance of "priming the pump" and the first of the alphabet work projects was launched. The CWA accepted a school building painting job, which along with a township road shaling project were the first attempt to place some cash into local circulation. Pay was an unheard of 50 cents per hour and just about every man able to wield a brush or a shovel was eligible. J. H. Mathison mentioned in later years that the sale of men's underwear was unbelievable that first Saturday night pay day. This project continued during the winter and by spring the CCC camps for youth were ready to go. Tree planting, dams, soil conservation, etc., made an impression on area farmers and provided

work for the youth. During the fall of that year the WPA made its appearance, paying \$12 per week on public works projects.

The spring of 1934 was a continuation of midwest drought. Dust storms from the Dakotas and western Minnesota darkened the sky. No rain occurred until early June. Pastures were bare and less than a 10% hay crop caused farmers to market cattle at bare freight charges. The story is told of a local sheep raiser who was billed more in freight charges than he got for his sheep. His scrawled reply on the bill was "I have no money but do have more sheep." Banks that were open had no money to loan. Sheriff's auctions were frequent and in many instances friends and neighbors halted such sales or limited bids at ridiculously low prices permitting the owner to retain possession. A moratorium on foreclosure sales was imposed for a time.

And there were other unusual happenings. One blustery day a delivery truck backed up to a local business place and a goodly crowd watched while a keg of 3.2 beer was rolled in and made ready for dispensing. Repeal of the 18th Amendment on Prohibition had been voted by Congress on February 20, 1933. The proposed 21st amendment had been sent to the states and it became effective December 5, 1933. In the mean time 3.2 beer had been termed non-intoxicating, and while this attempt to evade the ban on alcoholic beverages ended up in the courts, Unity officials held off any action. Five places on main street served beer for a time and Unity, for the first time since its formation in 1878, was no longer dry.

In 1935 town officials purchased a caterpillar track tractor and a snow plow for \$5,000. The next year a move began to create a dam at the bridge crossing on the Beef River. WPA labor was available and township cost would be small. Clearing the proposed lake area of brush began the following year. Putting in the footings for the actual dam continued through the winter. In the meantime a park improvement bond issue of \$5,000 was voted in by a 336 to 81 margin and in the spring of 1938, the lake was an actuality.

The township entertained another referendum

in 1939. PWA had money available for construction of a four year high school building. Contributions by local taxpayers was in kind, that is site, water, sewer, etc. The vote failed 180 yes to 238 no. (The total vote was one more than on the dam issue). About this time town officials paid \$400 for the Temperance Hall to members of that now inactive society. Purchase of a fire truck was also made. Also at this time many farms had taken advantage of the instruction of rural electrification. The Farm Security Administration was sponsoring a finance program for your farmers.

Then to the Scandinavian descendants of this country came news that Hitler had invaded Norway in April, 1940. European nations were already involved in the struggle. It seemed Congress had an awakening coming. With a world war cloud high on the horizon, the U. S. Senate passed the Selective Service Act on September 16, 1940 by a vote of 58 to 31. The Act was extended in August of 1941 by a 45 to 30 vote. Less than four months later, December 8, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan. The World War II effort reached about everyone and only a line can be spent here. Harold Brian, head of the VFW Post states that membership in that group was over 120 after the war ended, including WWI veterans. He added that not all veterans belonged and that many local men never served overseas. Germany signed an unconditional surrender on May 7, 1945. Japan followed in August.

A Union Free High School District including all of Unity had been formed in 1945. The vote was 267 to 67. Every nook of the district #2 building was in use to make this accommodation. Only 6 years earlier voters had rejected a new building at very low cost. The school tax for 10 grades had been \$2,769.97 in 1935. 12 grades in the new district required \$22,840.97 in 1947.

Residents of the village voted to incorporate in 1948. The population had increased over the years and a water and sewer utility was required. Other improvements seemed necessary and a division between the village and the township seemed desirable to accomplish all of

these. During 1952 the water and waste disposal lines were laid. During the next

decade residential building outstripped every small town in this part of Wisconsin.

Schools

Unity has had four schools within its 6 mile square. Riverview, sometimes called Langerfield school or #1, the village district known as joint #2, Brick Riverview district #3, and Johnson Valley, district #4 formed in 1870. Prior to the Unity separation from Sumner these districts had been numbered 5, 6, 7, and 8 by that township.

Formation and early history of these schools would be an interesting story but safekeeping of records had not been a priority in the early years of the districts. The records yet available should have a central depository. Of the above mentioned schools only Johnson Valley has a complete fiscal record. Brick Riverview has a good part of its history while the village district can produce only a treasurer's book covering the earliest 35 years. Riverview #1 has nothing except for a few notes of the year 1875 now in the Murphy Library files in La Crosse. As rural schools had comparable problems with buildings, taxes, teachers, etc., Johnson Valley's story, while told in more detail than the others, had incidents that were probably common to all the districts.

Unity township records show the first tax payments were made to these districts in 1879. \$100 was paid to District #1, \$100 was paid to J. H. Ballerud of District #2. The same amount was paid to Alphonse Dickey of District #3 (also called the Howery School), and \$25 was paid to Ole Thomasgaard to District #4. All of these schools had been organized in 1870 or earlier but Sumner records are not available at this time. Without these books we can only assume early happenings based on a minimum of first hand sources.

Riverview District #1 The Sumner assessment roll of 1865 shows a school tax was assessed against personal property in all of sections 10, 11, 14 and 15. The 1877 Tucker map shows that the school originally stood on the Langerfield property in the southeast quarter of section 11. The building was rebuilt and

moved in 1882 to the P. B. Williams property north of Highway 10 in the northeast corner of section 15. It was just west of an old road leading down the hill to the red bridge.

Village District #2 An old treasurers book with entries beginning in 1881 is the first record of a school that later included the village of Strum. A couple of \$40.00 payments to John Ballerud who owned the Northwest quarter of section 18 were made before Unity was formed may be a clue that classes were taught on his property. The 1870 Sumner assessment shows \$10 levied on sections 18 and 19 of present Unity but that sum would furnish little education even in those days. Unless first hand evidence is found we must merely assume that children attended classes. No one knows where.

John Ballerud received \$271.40 in district taxes in 1880 and a building must have been planned because a deed was recorded, stone for a footing was hauled by Ed Lyons and a \$17.25 painting cost is entered. The whole amount of monies received by June 5th, 1882 was \$285.13. Pastor C. J. Helsum had been elected treasurer. The teacher's wage in 1881 was \$18.25 per month, but rose to \$56.00 per month in 1882. The inevitable broom cost 30 cents.

\$10 was spent for books in 1884. The teacher's wages were \$120 for two terms and we learn that Pete Frodahl built a wood shed for \$20. About 1887 there was evidently a fire. \$300 was received from an insurance company and the usual repair work was expended. Pastor Helsem had been replaced as treasurer and record keeping is rather confusing. About 1895 the district had a treasurer who did not use the letter "H". About this time the district also purchased a school lot from Pastor Helsem at the present location of the unused brick school. In 1897 the one room school was remodeled. L. Hogue furnished stone for \$81.00, John Nelson was paid \$24.95 for plastering, Severt Rekstad received \$32.50 for

doors and windows, N. C. Foster furnished lumber for \$257.20. The total cost was \$694.27. This included desks, blackboards, etc., and served the district until 1915 when the brick building was erected.

A new treasurer handled the book in an approved fashion after 1900. Total receipts for 1906 were \$509.78, expenditures were \$492.18. In 1904 a second classroom was constructed, evidently enrollment had increased. The lumber bill was \$325.11 and carpenters' work was \$114. Bills for stone, plastering, seats, freight and other miscellaneous items came to \$253.82. According to old pictures the rooms were set at right angles to each other. Claude Burton and his sister Leona (Mrs. J. M. Olson) taught at monthly salaries of \$50 and \$42.50 respectively.

As years passed, enrollment kept increasing and books and teaching materials were added causing expenditures to increase slowly. Florence Parker was head teacher in 1908. William Cox of Osseo taught a couple of terms around 1911, receiving \$52 per month, the highest teacher's wage up to that date.

District taxes had been around \$900 for a couple of years leading up to 1914. There seemed to be three teachers with Robert Kuenzli as principal.

Enrollment had been growing as the population in the village increased and it seems some thinking had occurred regarding a new and larger building. Attaining a state graded level and at least two years of high school had been discussed at annual meetings. Families in the village favored a school south of the river but Carter Valley residents raised a howl and threatened a boycott of village business places should this take place. So the board purchased additional land from Paul Eide, about \$80 was spent on earth moving and shortly after the July, 1914 annual meeting contractor M. G. N. Schneider or Independence began work on a two story, four classroom, brick building. The treasurer's book, of course, shows only receipts and disbursement figures. No meeting reports, resolutions or minutes which could furnish a better clue to those proceedings can be found.

The last pages of that old book shows

building costs and tax revenues plus a couple of loans that financed the project. The architect was paid \$75 for the plans (no high percentage fee for that board!). Heating and ventilating cost \$550.00, cement blocks were \$246.88. Freight totalled \$43.97 and Sever Johnson had a well drilling contract at \$23.50. The balance, \$9405.18, went to M. G. N. Schneider for a sum total of \$10,344.53. Cash raised was as follows:

District #2 began with a building fund of	\$ 1,200.00
A state trust fund loan	7,000.00
Loan from First State Bank of Strum	2,000.00
Sale of three old buildings	153.83
Less an error in bank interest	<u>-16.00</u>
	\$10,337.83
Expenditures	\$10,344.53

Then follows a blunt statement, "short in bldg. fund" \$6.70.

Present day financiers rarely explain any overruns or deficits on construction projects and their high priced computers would have difficulty imprinting \$6.70. Paul Moltzau and Henry Robbe were members of that board and the driving force behind the building project. One of them may have just dug in his pocket and covered the "shortage".

The building was in good use as a school until May, 1957.

Brick Riverview District #3 Available records of this school go back to 1874 but again the early years are missing. This was District #7 on Sumner records indicating that it was established prior to Johnson Valley #8 which was formed in 1870. Also the 1869 Sumner assessment roll shows that settlers of the district were assessed a school tax, telling us school was being held.

The organization of Unity township on April 2, 1878 was held in the original Brick Riverview building, at the time called the Hovery school. Two brothers with that name lived in section 26 and likely were early settlers in the area. Very few people lived at the village site during those years and township meetings were held at this school until 1887. This building seems to have had the same location in District #3 as the later one. We

find reference to it in 1874 as being an "old, unpainted, frame structure", undoubtedly erected some years earlier. This description told of the one room having a stove in the center and long benches without backs furnished seating for the pupils. A further mention is made at early meetings of the purchase of tamarack timber cut in 2 foot lengths for heating.

Early minutes show that John Klungseth was elected clerk at the August 31, 1874 meeting. \$350, a high sum for those days, was raised for conducting two school terms, one of three months and one of two months. \$300 was raised the next year with two 3-month terms approved. Teacher's pay seemed to be either \$25 or \$30 per month. A 7-month school year was voted the next year with a reduction in the tax to \$100. There was probably too much money in the treasury. A male teacher was requested for the first term, a female for the spring term. It seems as though the bigger boys were busy with farm work in the spring. There was also some trouble. At a special meeting in May, 1878, the teacher was dismissed and a vote to hold no school carried 13 to 5.

The district always had an ample treasury. In 1886 the annual meeting authorized the board to build a new brick building and permitted the borrowing of \$500 at 7%, repayable in five installments. Teachers seemed to have slightly better pay in this district but a few unruly pupils must have attended as repeated statements about hiring male teachers or strangers to the district appear several times. The board was conservative in some manners also. A move to build a belfry appears during the latter 1890's, no more than \$5.00 would be paid. No bids were received and a later entry shows \$8.00 was expended.

In 1903 Bertha Dahl, daughter of Lars Dahl, a board member, was hired as teacher because her certificate was the best of all candidates. A 1906 meeting notes that board member Ole Halverson did not attend because he was busy harvesting grain, but "he would consider any agreement made."

Clerks' entries are not in chronological order

and thus difficult to trace. Annual meetings are referred to as "last meetings" and a district gathering on July 9, 1945 bears this designation. \$1150 was raised to conduct school for the coming term, however, and we find several teachers taught after that time. A 75th anniversary observation was held in 1961 with Alice Engan listed as teacher.

Johnson Valley District #4 Town authorities ordered the organization of a school when an area seemed to have enough settlers to warrant a tax to support a teacher and enough pupils to keep one busy. Esten Johnson Dahl had lived in section 29 nearly two years when we find a notice served on him by W. W. Thomas and N. F. Carter, supervisors of Sumner, ordering circulation of a notice for a school organization meeting to be held at his home on September 26, 1870. The notice was to be read to every qualified voter of the potential district. We find that Esten appointed Sam Hogue to serve this notice which he did on September 20th. The settlers in the area were predominantly Norwegians but by that date their written intention of applying for land entitled them to vote.

The first meeting was held as scheduled at 1:00 P.M. on the 26th. Sam found himself elected chairman of the gathering and wound up as clerk of the district. Oley Johnson was elected director and Dahl treasurer. It was voted to hold 5 months of school and a \$60.00 tax was levied on the district. A conversation many years later with Gilbert Dahl, son of Esten, cast additional light on the happening. He remembered the 5 months of school were divided into two terms, that classes were held at their home that first year, and that children from the west valley of the district arrived by a road that split section 29 leading from the so-called "bluff" road to the valley road that bordered the east side of the Johnson land and extended north along the east rim of the valley to where the cemetery was established in 1877. He recalled also, and the records verify this, that a school building was erected in time for the next fall term and the location was on the west side of the creek and a few hundred feet south of the hill road. It was a very small

building. Esten was paid 75 cents for a pail and broom that first year and his record as treasurer shows an expenditure of \$60.80 for the second year. A broom and pail had then gone up a nickel. The purchase also included a "tin cup" for 10 cents. No pupil census is available now and Gilbert Dahl had no comment regarding those who attended except to mention that many youth took advantage of any opportunity to learn the new language.

The annual meeting of district 8, town of Sumner, which was held September 25, 1871, had nothing regarding building expense but the 1872 meeting shows that \$225.00 was raised to pay debts of the district. We find that Sam Hogue received \$3.20 for a stove and pipe. \$1.60 was spent for the clerks book and he received \$20 for boarding the teacher. The 3rd annual meeting has a list of 19 taxpayers and their wages for working on the school building. Amounts from \$1.87 to \$4.12 are listed for these men and \$10 is the cost of freighting lumber from Osseo. Again Esten had a bill for a tin cup, tin pail and a broom totalling 80 cents. The cost of the lumber was \$61.72. Even Evenson was elected clerk in 1874. An interesting note reads that \$100 was to be raised to straighten the school house. There was still no mention of any expenditure for books.

Then in April, 1875 we have a move to rebuild the school and to place the building near the northwest corner of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 28. This immediately awoke the taxpayers in the west valley (Rognlien Valley) and at a special meeting in June of that year there was a move to build in the "center" of the district, the southwest corner of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 29. Evenson evidently had the meeting well organized because the move was approved. The school was built in the next two months, plastered and ready at a cost of \$206.81.

At the 1876 annual meeting we find the first expenditure for school books. \$18.27 was sent to the Skandinavian, a norwegian daily in Chicago. Also, on December 28, 1876, Ole Thomasgaard and John Rice earned \$4.50 for building a toilet.

Isabelle Torbler was the first teacher

mentioned, Hattie Thompson the next. Both received orders of \$12 and \$14 per month respectfully in 1876. The annual meeting of 1878 was first in the town of Unity. The Johnson Valley school was now District #4.

\$20 was spent for wood in 1879. Nels Kleven was clerk and his clear handwriting continues for several terms. Teachers during the 80's were Iver Peterson, Edgar Nevin and Ingeborg Ness. The latter lived in Carter Valley and walked each school day, rain or shine, from her home to the Thomasgaard farm, then across fields to the southwest corner of Nels Kleven's farm, and then to the school.

Annual meetings always decided on a two term school year, usually beginning the first of October, a winter vacation and another term beginning in June. During the late 1880's there was a move to have male teachers and D. W. Maloney taught in 1889. Also in that year Severt Rekstad, A. Larson and Hans Hammer were elected to plan a new school building to be located in the southeast corner of the the northeast quarter of section 29. Possibly the valley road which followed a section line north to the cemetery had been relocated for easier travel by that date. The building site was adjoining the road on the east.

A special meeting was held in November, 1889 when plans for a 22'x32' building with a 12' ceiling were presented. The footing stone was to be furnished by Allen Anderson at \$5.00 per cord. Paul Christopherson bid 56 cents per thousand for hauling lumber from Strum. The old building was sold to Allen Anderson for \$31.50. The railroad was in operation by the next spring but no lumber yard had yet been established. Sivert Rekstad had drawn the plans, traveled to Fairchild to place the lumber order and was paid \$1.84 railroad fare along with a \$1 hotel bill and \$1.50 for his time. He was a pretty low-priced architect. The freight charge for the lumber was paid to the Chicago, St. Paul, Minnesota and Omaha RR Company on August 4, 1890. The building was similar to nearly all such rural schools dotting the countryside at that date. Nels Kleven's details of costs are clearly

written and could serve as a barometer of such building constructions in those times. The cost of lumber, doors and windows was \$206.14. Morton Brandon was paid \$8.00 for his mason work on the footing. John Nelson did the plastering for \$13.40. Ole Nysven furnished a heater for \$2.20. Desks were \$103.65 and Sivert Rekstad was paid \$94.50 for erecting and painting the new building. There were about \$100 in miscellaneous expenses such as insurance, leveling and fencing the school yard, paint, brick, etc. The entire cost came to slightly over \$500.00. The Johnson Valley School ended up with a square foot cost of slightly over 70 cents and served the district for 60 years. The last edition at Central High School was \$32.00 per square foot. Johanna Solland was the teacher when all this took place.

The next teacher was Maria Halvorson. \$7.68 was spent for books, 2 yards of toweling cost 20 cents and a stove purchased from Kittleson and Willumson cost \$18.50. The 1893 meeting had a drastic departure from regular routine. A six month term was voted in, beginning September 1, with no winter interruption. A special meeting in July, however, again divided the term, 4 months beginning October 1 and 2 months beginning April 1. J. P. Hanson was school clerk, the first of many public offices that covered school, town and county service over a period of more than forty years. W. F. Short taught in 1894. Maggie Warner succeeded him.

The 25th annual meeting had little controversy except the school term. A dictionary was purchased that year as were 6 library books. Clara Lewis taught one term for \$25 per month, another for \$30. The clerk's salary had remained at \$5.00 for twenty years. During the last term of this school year we find the first real expenditure for books. Orders from several companies totaled \$37.50. Crayons, a broom, and matches added up to 40 cents. John Dahl was paid \$10.00 for the school deed and the inevitable 40 cents was again paid for a tin pail.

K. N. Tweet, a Strum plumber, was paid \$19.00 for a pump in 1896, but we fail to locate

the cost of a well anywhere. W. H. Phillips and Agnes Salt were teachers during the next four years. Also, there are entries showing that Mr. Tweet made several repairs to the pump he had sold.

Daily attendance records with the term progress comments by teachers during the 1890's are available and very interesting. Maggie Warner had 46 pupils enrolled of which several were 17 years of age and one 23. Her upper grades, 11 pupils in all, had read Longfellow's *Evangeline*, Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, and *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. They also had studied the constitution of this state and graded over 75 in an exam thereof. Decimals, percentages and square root procedures had been included in their course of study. The middle grades were studying the handling of fractions. She mentioned the primary grades needed spelling study.

W. H. Phillips followed Maggie Warner and had 46 pupils, including 4 17-year-olds. His commentary is rather brief, merely mentioning how far each class had progressed in their various books and telling about absenteeism among the primary class during winter months. Several young children had a 2½ mile hike twice a day. Multiplication tables, division, fractions and measurements were mentioned. It seems land measurement was part of the instruction in those days.

Agnes Salt listed 42 pupils during her term and was followed by Clara Lewis who had a busy school year with 64 students. Three pupils were 17 years old, and all 64 attended at some time or other. Martin and Bertha Rice had only 3 days of school but may have moved into or out of the district during the year. The upper grades had studied the settlement of America up to that time. They needed composition work (who doesn't), but they could handle fractions and decimals well. The lower grades had a progress report of various studies. On a special page was a listing of numbers on a Christmas program. Three recitations opened the entertainment. A song, "The Christmas Army" was sung by the whole school (no mention of how they were packed

in), more recitations and a topic "Why don't parents visit school?" More recitations followed and there was an address by a pupil named Melvin. Our present day atheists would have been horrified by the final number, A Norwegian Christmas song. An examination of the enrollment proved that all 64 were of Norwegian descent.

Julia Olson taught classes in 1901. John L. Dahl followed in 1902. Again K. N. Tweet repaired the pump at a cost of \$6.00. Soap and a comb were provided and there seemed to be a continuation of the split term policy. Marie Hanson, Minnie Knutson, Maria O. Dahl and Tena Anderson were teaching over the next years and K. N. Tweet's repair bill for the pump dropped to \$5.25.

An entry and cloak room was added in 1903. Gilbert Nysven and Gilbert Dahl were paid for carpenter labor and lumber was purchased from the N. C. Foster Co. Mollie Stensby was the teacher at \$38.00 per month.

The treasurer's records were neatly kept but, of course, reveal little of school problems. It seems that in 1908 a new heating and ventilating system was installed at a cost of \$62.81. A library cabinet was purchased and N. E. Kleven's clerks salary rose to \$10 per annum. The two term school year seems to have ended about this time. Eliza Jensen followed Miss Stensby. Sever Johnson succeeded K. N. Tweet as an annual repair man. Insurance for the building and contents, painting and a long popular flag pole installed about 1917 seem about the only out of the ordinary expenses for the school board.

Hazel Paulson succeeded Eliza Jensen for two terms, followed by Olga Berg. Julianna Jensen and again Olga Berg brought school into the early 1920's. School programs raised money for a phonograph about this time and the first globe was purchased. Hot milk, cocoa

and coffee were served at noon, again raised by programs. Miss Berg became very popular with the boys when she bought a catcher's mitt out of her meager salary. Bats were whittled out of poplar. School days seemed shorter after this for the boys.

Ida Hopland taught several terms during the early 1920's at a salary of \$85.50 per month. Wood cost \$5.00 per four-foot cord and a telephone had been installed. The district school tax varied from \$200-\$500 per year. Violet Paulson was the next teacher and pump repair had dropped to \$3.25.

The district tax rose to \$700 in 1928. County aid was \$250 and state tax revenue was \$258.45. Mable Eide taught at a \$90.00 monthly salary. Sivert Rekstad, a board member, received \$5.00 for attending the county school convention. He had been an active district member for nearly fifty years. Pump repair was down to \$1.50. Keziah Severson taught the next two terms at a salary of \$90.00 per month. Josie Pederson followed in 1931 and 1932 at \$85.00 and \$80.00 per month. The depression was being felt. Banking must have been handled at Whitehall as the Melby Bank had a service charge.

Transportation aid was paid to five family heads of the district in 1933. Sedona Gullicksrud was paid \$65.00 per month as teacher. Stella Mahlum succeeded her at the same figure in 1934. The district raised \$300.00 in school tax. Theodore Hanson from 1935-1937 at \$71.25 per month. Bernice Berg succeeded Hanson and taught through the spring of 1942, followed by Selma Gilbertson. The first bill for electric lights was recorded in the fall of 1938. The district tax levy had jumped from \$300 to \$1500 in the ten years 1934 to 1944. The last year of school at District #4 was 1948-1949.

Names

The matter of some reinformation regarding names of municipalities, landmarks, streams, etc., is worth a few lines. The reason for several are already slipping from memory. We shall begin with the river.

It is not the slowest moving stream of water. The forks which merge at Osseo each drain a side of the east-west ridge in Jackson County, the north following Highway 100 and the south branch flowing along Highway 27 and

County Trunk B. Both branches begin about 1142 feet above sea level on either side of this ridge, but less than ¼ mile apart. The Osseo bench mark where the forks merge reads 958 feet above sea level. The river drops to 892 feet ASL at Strum, 872' at Eleva, is 812' at Mondovi and enters the beef sloughs at 682 feet above sea level.

French explorers and traders are given credit for the original name, Riviere Des Beauf. Their language had no name for buffalo at that time (1685), they called these large animals "bof", meaning beef. A few bison had crossed the Mississippi and were roaming these lower river valleys and the Trempealeau prairie at that time. Residents of this valley use the literal English translation. The stream had been the "Beef" for well over a hundred years.

Now to municipal names - Mondovi was visited by Napoleon's army on an early foray into Italy. The first settlers here used "pancake valley" for a short time.

The 1877 Tucker map has "New Chicago" at the Eleva location. The first merchant, R. P. Goddard, and E. S. Carpenter platted the "Eleva addition to Albion" in December, 1877 and filed the paper in January, 1878. From that time the place was known as Eleva and was a lively, strictly dry, trade center. The first elevator was erected some 14 years later, refuting another story.

The first inkling of any movement that eventually established a community center that resulted in "Strum" began when Sumner supervisor Even Evenson laid out a town road paralleling the present County D into the Big Creek area. His sole objective was additional membership for St. Paul's Norwegian Lutheran Church, which was erected later that spring and ready for its first worship service on May 18, 1877. The wheel tracks were known as the Carter Creek Road which continued south of the river and became the main street of Strum. A two acre plot for a church and cemetery was donated by A. J. Lyon with an agreement that he and his family have a burial site. The old pioneer's marker can be easily seen next to the present day Woodland Drive.

This area was a sparsely settled part of Unity when it formed in 1878. A year later Pastor C. J. Helsem came to serve the two-year-old St. Paul's congregation and erected a small home on the present Boehne property. Later Per Bonkrud build a blacksmith shop on what is now Woodland Drive, then known as the Osseo road. In late 1883 Thor Holden and Ole Kittleson each set up two small general store buildings on this same road. Kittleson's place of business still stands at 313 Woodland Drive and was the site of considerable sign painting for several years.

Kittleson received a postal appointment of February 20, 1885. It must have been a big day for the Norwegian settlers. No longer was it necessary to hike 3-4 miles to Hamlin where they dealt with crusty Russell Bowers for any mail. The local community was small, the brush line was broken by only six buildings. Besides Holden's and Kittleson's stores, the church, Finstad's blacksmith shop, a small one room school and Pastor Helsem's residence comprised the whole town - and it needed a name. Kittleson had a shingle to paint. "Price" for congressman W. T. Price was suggested but he had been accorded that honor further up river. A note somewhere credits Kittleson with suggesting Strum, but there is agreement the choice was made by Pastor Helsem.

A news story by two local men published in the Skandinavian, a Chicago Norwegian daily, reveals that Helsem had suggested "Strum" in honor of Louis Strum, the Eau Claire County Register of Deeds. He had been speaker at local Temperance Society meetings, was interested in youth and served on the board of directors of the first YMCA in Eau Claire. Pastor Helsem was a promoter of the society and Mr. Strum had been his house guest on several occasions.

So Kittleson painted "Strum P. O." on a board. The honored gentleman was rather unaffected and had, in fact, made a remark, "It wasn't much of a place to have named for one". It was either this remark, or Kittleson may have had sympathy for Samuel Tilden, the Democrat presidential candidate who had received the most popular votes in the 1876

election only to lose the election in the electoral college by a vote of 185 to 184. Anyway, in 1887 Kittleson oiled up his brush and applied "Tilden" on the board. It lasted two years.

When another post office by that name was called to his attention in late 1889 he hauled out the brush and reapplied "Strum" on the board permanently. This writer painted the Kittleson place in 1930 and saw the old sign board, but had developed no historical interest at that time.

Osseo had no real explanation. The most logical seems to be the use of the mythical Longfellow character in "*The Song of Hiawatha*". A conversation with a historian at Osseo, Minnesota some years ago gave no explanation of their choice of name either.

As mentioned earlier, Price was named for congressman W. T. Price who also owned the Eau Claire-Sparta stage line during the late 1860's.

Regarding coulees and valleys, Kings Valley is named for James King, an early settler. So is Tracy Valley. Hale got its name from George Hale, an early settler in section 32, T23, R8. Somewhere is a note that he was a grand nephew of the patriot Nathan Hale. Some years later his neighbor was Nathaniel Bruce in section 28 who gave Bruce Valley its name.

Three yankee squatters lived in Chimney Rock area in 1867 when Charles Wenberg from Solor, Norway settled in that township. Wenberg had authority to open mail sacks for that area when a later stage line wagon passed through. Martin Borst settled in section 32 and section 33 of Chimney Rock sometime in the early 1860's at about the same time an early settler named Bennett located himself in Bennett Valley.

The three northern townships of Trempealeau County have carried four names during the last 120 years. All lands included lie above township line 24 and include ranges 7, 8 and 9 west. This area was included in one township named Sumner established and first assessed in 1859. It was named after Charles Sumner, a

Senator from Massachusetts. The first detachment from the new municipality came a couple of years later when bounty volunteer David Chase, a young man from Hamlin in Range 9, was killed at the battle of Shiloh. Neighbors and acquaintances formed a new township which included all area in Range 9 and one-half of Range 8 and named it the Town of Chase in remembrance of the young veteran. The population seemed to be small and continually changing in that area and in 1869 all trace of Chase township disappeared when residents of Range 9 formed a new township and called it Albion, a common English name applied to places in several states. Sumner then governed all lands in Ranges 7 and 8 for nearly a decade when residents in the latter range wished to assume their own responsibilities. Petitions were circulated and the Town of Unity took shape on April 2, 1878. The two earliest settlers were accorded the honor of selecting a name. There was a difference of opinion. Dennis Lawler, the first settler, felt his surname should be considered. P. B. Williams, a native of Unity, Maine, wanted his home town to have that honor. Straws were drawn and P. B. won.

Johnson Valley, east of Strum, got its name from Esten Johnson Dahl, its first settler. Jack Carter settled in section 18 north of town to give that valley its name. Main street of this village was known as the Carter Creek road for many of its early years. Further up that valley the branch east is known as Call Valley in honor of Andrew Call, an early settler. The valley south of Strum was known as the West Valley according to old maps. The town road leading south off County H is known as the Rognlien Road. Four families of that name lived in the coulee in an early day. East of Strum a highway known as the Williams road lets you travel north over the ridge into Romunstad Valley. P. B. Williams laid out this road while he was an early chairman. The road terminates on County D in the long valley always known as Big Creek.

The 1914 Fires

It is often admitted that any major change in appearance of a small town business district occurs only after a major fire. Strum underwent two such happenings in December, 1914.

The first instance removed the Pederson store and the old central lean-to located on the corner of the present Immanuel Church lot. The fire department crew used the opportunity to become acquainted with their newly acquired hand pumper. Both buildings, however, burned to the ground.

The second fire took place on the evening of December 25, a night long remembered by village residents. Six frame buildings on the east side of Main Street went up in smoke leaving scars that remained for a decade. The blaze started in J. C. Call's living quarters on the second floor of his business building north

of the depot. With a south wind aiding the fire, it consumed everything in its path, finally being stopped by T. M. Olson's two story brick building. Besides Call's large place of business, gone were the hotel and Olson's two story heavy hardware shop and three smaller buildings.

According to Clarence Knutson, then 15 years old and manning a position on the new pumper, a fire was under control at Call's second floor when the cistern went dry. The fire got a good headway while a second source of water was obtained and when some ambitious fireman cut the nozzle off the hose, hope of control was gone. Willing hands removed furniture from the hotel and stock from a couple of the buildings. Flames were high above the tallest building and visible for several miles.



Central House, the first hotel in Strum was built by Carl Frodal. It had a back wing, a small lobby, dining room and kitchen, but no bath. Dell Williams operated it shortly after 1900, Bert Hanson ran it at the time it burned in the 1914 fire. It was located just south of the present Post Office.



T. M. Olson's office and hardware shop stood just north of the hotel and burned in the 1914 fire.

As usual a humorous happening took place during all this activity. Fred Lyons was an avid fox hunter and kept three or four hounds in near starving condition during the winter in order to insure their hunting ability. The proprietor of the meat market which was just beyond the Olson building felt certain the blaze would reach his shop and decided to empty his stock of meat into a snow drift outside a back window. He didn't know that all

hounds had been released from their pen when the fire was first reported and he did not see the hungry dogs catching hams and roasts on the fly and hurrying off to bury them for consumption at a later day. Later that evening, when all danger was ended he secured help to retrieve his stock only to find little and to see some sad looking hounds viewing his efforts. The dogs became fat and worthless at Lyon's sport the balance of the winter.



Looking north on Main Street, this picture shows the east side prior to the 1914 fire. The fire destroyed every visible building north of the depot.



The aftermath of the 12/25/14 fire. Note the T. M. Olson building, virtually unchanged for the next 60 years.

The Hold-Off Society

The small hall opposite Immanuel Lutheran Church on Elm Street may be of little interest to many now that a fresh coat of paint obliterates the sign that identified it as the Temperance Hall. But it is one of the oldest buildings in town and was erected by a community wide social group that met regularly every month beginning in the early 1880's with an avowed purpose of "holding-off" the use of alcohol beverages.

Not that alcoholic use was wide spread here a hundred years ago. The Yankee settlers were of New England stock and though some men may have enjoyed a nip on occasions, they were usually abstainers. Immigrants had little money beyond necessities back in those days and so the Norwegians favored øl instead of the fiery stuff. In any event these Norwegians organized a temperance society in the early eighties and met regularly on the second floor at Finstad's hall. A pair of strict temperance men, Olson and Ager, published the Reform, a semi-weekly, at Eau Claire and were prime instigators of this movement. The paper was well written, had wide circulation among Norwegian readers and publicized temperance issues prominently. Eau Claire library files reveal spring election canvass results of all municipalities in the area regarding wet-dry results.

This society was likely the first and only community-wide meeting group at that time and may have provided an opportunity for social gathering also. Outside speakers were frequent and it should be remembered that Strum is named for one of these men. Temperance translated literally into Norwegian is "av-hold" or "hold-off", so this early group was in a sense, the hold-off society. What success or influence did they have? How long were they active?

The hall shows up on the oldest picture of this town, snapped a short time after the railroad came down the valley. Pioneer merchant Hans Willumson was the force behind its erection and may have financed it substantially. It was one of the very first buildings that went

up after Strum began moving south of the river. An old story persists that Finstad permitted dancing on his 2nd floor which ended the relationship with the hold-off society. Willumson charged a dollar per meeting for hall rental. Beginning in 1894 it was used by Unity township for their annual meetings for 84 years. The ladies band practiced there and during early years a local unit of the Skandinavian Working Men's Society used the hall for meetings. It was used for justice court cases, a wedding or two and a meeting that resulted in erection of the church across the street took place in that hall. The last meetings of the temperance society were held about 1905 although no records now exist. In spite of their activity the community became wet in time.



Dr. Paul J. Weig obtained his degree from Marquette University in 1901. He practiced a short time at Fargo, N.D. and came to Strum in 1905. His services to residents of this community were countless: perhaps outstanding were the days and nights he spent on sleighs in the winter of 1918 during the serious flu epidemic. His only sleep were catnaps between calls as the sleighs carried from one place to the next. As many of you remember, the above was a typical pose.

It is said that whiskey was often used as legal tender when money was short. A horse trade was often made with a keg of hard stuff serving as part payment. Not that such traffic played a part in development of our good village but a jug occasionally made its appearance. Again we must mention that early Norwegians were in many instances abstainers. The story comes down through the years telling of a visit to the head of one family of a brother long gone. To celebrate the event the visitor purchased a case of beer from which all were served. Twenty-five years later he came again and received a second serving - from the same case.

The railroad brought a great increase of trade to the village and with it came the first handling of booze. There was no legal sale of the stuff but no law prevented an order shipped from outside sources to local customers, and such shipments came principally from a Fairchild retailer. He had a rather odd appearance, an unusual name and a puzzling characteristic. He was a very short man named Napoleon Santo. His weekly routine included a stop at Strum between trains. Orders were received then and accounts collected. His scrawls were unreadable because the man actually could not write. But to the puzzlement of local yokels there was never an error either way.

Merchant Nels Robbe had a brief entry into the liquor game also. Shortly after 1900 local authorities permitted Strum's druggist to retail liquor on receipt of a doctor's prescription. The pharmacist decided to move and sold his stock to Robbe who decided to keep the business going until he could find a permanent operator. Nels was a busy man and not too careful about requiring the necessary prescriptions. A stranger obtained a bottle one day without fulfilling the requirements. A few days later the sheriff called on Nels and served notice for a court appearance. At the stranger's (actually an inspector) recommendation the judge levied a healthy fine. Nels severed himself from the liquor trade within a few days.

On a hot summer afternoon in pre-prohibition days it was not unusual for a group to have a Santo-bought keg cooling somewhere,

to be tapped under a shady tree after a 10-12 hour work day was finished. An undeveloped section in the northwest part of the village had several spots for such gatherings.

And then comes a tale relating to the 1911 July 4th celebration. Several young blades had a couple of kegs stored in the back room of a local cafe to be opened during the evening dance at the MWA Hall. Their plans became known to several young ladies who were participants in a parade float that afternoon. The gals thought a Carrie Nation-type raid would add spice to the event and gathered hatchets and axes for a real act. Some men overheard their plans and stole the equipment before the parade began. It could have been a real show.

Mention was made earlier in this story that first settlers had little money to spend for alcoholic beverages. This was very true but as years passed and the populace became more affluent, the use of the stuff became more common. The town board permitted druggists to sell liquor by the bottle on receipt of a doctor's prescription. There are no records of such sales at that time but Dr. P. J. Weig's 1914 daily log book has become available and has some interesting entries. Besides his regular business the book is filled with 25 cent charges for these prescriptions. Male members of a family would sometimes be entered on a single page indicating an event was observed. It all ended with the approval of the national prohibition amendment which was passed in January 1919 and became effective January 20, 1920. This amendment was repealed in February, 1933 to become effective in December of that year. In the meantime both mild and high content beverages trafficked with out control and without tax.

After prohibition was repealed ordinances were adopted at the township level and several local elections resulted as years passed. In 1935 the vote was: Liquor 127 yes, 123 no; Beer 172 yes, 90 no. In 1937 the vote was Liquor 165 for to 136 against; Beer 192 for to 116 against. In 1938 the vote was Liquor 194 for to 202 against; Beer 227 for to 174 against. In 1939: Liquor 246 for, 178 against.

The MWA Hall

Every live community has had at least one meeting place wherein the community could gather for a variety of purposes. Sometimes the second floor of a business place served this need, a school room or a village hall, any place that provided light and heat. Here in Strum the second floor of Chris Finstad's blacksmith shop was the first place within village limits that housed meetings. Annual township meetings began there in 1887 and about that time the local temperance society began their crusade to keep Unity "dry". But when Finstad permitted a public dance on his floor the society built their own hall across the river and a note exists somewhere that Hans Willumson, likely the promoter, permitted meetings for a dollar fee. Temperance meetings were held regularly and beginning in 1894 annual township meetings were held in that hall for the next 84 years. Unity acquired ownership of it in 1939.

However, the temperance hall had limited meeting space and along about 1900 or just before, the Modern Woodman, an insurance group, moved into the community and convinced the locals that Strum must have a gathering place representative of such a live, growing town. Said "town" had no bank, no telephone system, only a few board walks, only frame buildings. It did have some ambitious businessmen.

A "hall" was a needed addition to the community at the time. The railroad was bringing in new business. There was talk of a bank. A new fangled gadget called a telephone was mentioned. Homes were being built. St. Paul's Church planned an enlargement. All in all things were booming and a good meeting place was in order.

So the MWA hall was built. A site on south main street was selected. John Olson, a local builder, erected a wood frame building with a stage and hardwood floor. Heat was furnished by a pot bellied stove while kerosene lamps gave light to evening performances.

The first social gathering beneath its roof was a wedding reception for Mr. and Mrs.

Nels Robbe. Gay events succeeded each other and one not so gay occurred when Ed Kenyon, the town's butcher, died in 1902. He had no connection with either church of the community so the funeral services took place at the hall. A good attendance was mentioned.

From its beginning the building played a prominent part in community life. Medicine shows were popular those days. Home talent plays always drew a full house. Lecturers, musical groups, and the first hesitant dance steps of present day great-grandmothers may have graced its well worn floor. For at least fifty years school programs were held on its stage. A governor campaigned within its doors, the first hand-cranked movie projectors blinked their thrilling photodrama there, auctions of all kinds, numerous church socials, and once a magician nearly drowned while demonstrating one of his own "Houdini" acts. And who can forget the night Postmaster Claude Burton demonstrated his powerful 5-tube, squealing, superhetrodyne radio to a full house back in 1922. Basketball, rollerskating, lyceum courses, band rehearsals, dozens of fiddle contests and once Thorstein Skarning, a Norwegian billed as the world's greatest accordianist, performed on stage. The audience had little appreciation of a Mozart sonata but raised the roof when he stooped to rip off a Norwegian hop-waltz.

The depression increased its use. The place would fill with farmers trying to better their lot. It became a gathering place for youth, renamed the "Playmore" by operator Alton Holte. A musical trio would entertain for dancing. Unbelievably, gasoline was only twenty cents a gallon, admission was 25 cents, your girl was admitted free. A hamburger sandwich at a nickel was a big evening. Ski tournaments brought contestants of all levels and from three directions, including several U. S. champions and the world's champion lady ski jumper from Norway. Banquets were held at the Playmore although cooking facilities were nill. The Commercial Club met there for years, owned the building and planned and

launched their housing projects at monthly meetings held there.

Later the village became owner and when the new municipal center was erected there was no longer a need for the old hall as a meeting place. It had many owners. How long it remained under Modern Woodman supervision is unknown but it seems original

A Town Meeting - 1933

The depression was at its most bleak time when I reached my 21st birthday. I could vote and happened to choose the hour scheduled for the township annual meeting to attend the polls. The meeting was the only such I ever attended and it made an indelible impression.

I can remember a packed Temperance Hall. Usually those meetings were sparsely attended. Not this time. All except maybe myself had one objective, cut taxes to the bone. And cut they did. J. P. Hanson was chairman and gaveled the meeting. Reports were read and criticized, calls for small outlays were quickly voted down. Came the board's recommendation for the year and all were amended with a lower figure for each item. When this part of the agenda had ended a quiet came over the room as if a great wrong had occurred. That, too, ended.

Mads Hanestad, a former supervisor, fixed

The Lumber Yard

N. C. Foster's railroad reached here the last days of 1889 and by spring a supply was stacked along the spur. Shortly afterward a small building had been erected with Sivert Rekstad handling the business. As lumber retailers in those days handled only lumber, Rekstad built the present oil storage building on 5th avenue wherein he stocked doors, windows, nails and other accessories of the building trade. He was a good builder and among other things had a fixed opinion about an advantage of square nails over round ones. For that reason many buildings in this area will have square nails long after the round were in full use.

Foster sold considerable lumber here in early days. First settlers could haul a load of hay to

construction costs back in 1900 were carried partially by the bank when it began operation. A remodeling project took place during the mid-twenties when the stage was moved to the north side and heating unit was installed. Again the bank furnished backing and when the bank closed in 1931, a director, N. M. Rognlien, was the owner.

his eye on Chairman Hanson and demanded to know what the board members were charging per diem. In his deliberate, halting manner Hanson explained that pay was \$3.00 per day when a full day was given to town affairs. No doubt many knew of countless errands, continuous doorbell ringing and free hours he alone had given during those strenuous months. This explanation made little impression.

From the back of the room came the booming voice of Pete Christianson, "I move we cut the town board in two." Quickly from big, jovial John Rognlien, in Norwegian, "Do you want a saw or an axe for the job, Pete?" Hilarity reigned for a minute. John's remark had put some humor back in the meeting. His question had eased tension and board members were left intact, both physically and otherwise.

his mill at Fairchild and return with a load of low grade, wide pine boards suitable for sheeting. The short run from his mill to yards on the railroad line enabled him to lay in stocks of lumber that retailed at \$10-\$12 per thousand feet. Then, too, bridge plank and timber bills appear continually on early township records. Bridges were many and necessary.

In 1906 Foster sold his yards to Wilson-Weber Lumber Company. In 1910 they sold to North Star who sold to Midland Lumber Company in 1916. Owen and Nelson became owners in 1919 and operated as O & N Lumber Company. United Building Center later became owners and Willard Rippenberg purchased their interests in 1968 and operated as Willard's Building Center until 1979.

Blacksmiths

A most important trade in early agricultural community was that of blacksmithing. Today the joining of metals has been speeded and simplified by use of either gas or electricity, but not too long ago the man who could forge iron stood alone as a master craftsman. Back when communication and transportation were not as today, when parts service was practically unknown and most every breakdown required a forging job, the blacksmith was an important man in a community and he is yet today.

Through these past hundred years this area has been fortunate in having not only one but several such men. All were schooled in their important trade, all were hardworking, ambitious fellows who attracted much traffic to this trade center.

First to set up shop was Per Bonkerud who had learned his trade in Norway and came here about 1880. His place of business was located on Woodland Drive a couple of hundred feet east of the cemetery. When his restlessness caused him to move, Chris Berg (Finstad) became the next operator about two years later. Finstad was alone at his trade until Even Peterson erected a shop north of the Strum Manufacturing Company building location soon after Strum moved across the river. Peterson's shop was later purchased by Halvor Sheffield, a short, husky man who had learned the trade in the old country. He went back for a short time and was spelled by Lennie Larson. Later Sheffield returned, operated the business several years and sold to machinist Albert Thompson. The latter gave excellent service for several years.

Jewel Berge purchased Thompson's interest in 1948, erected a new building and organized the Strum Mfg. Company where products included bale forks, freight truck accessories, shop exhaust systems, vacuum machine parts and dozens of other parts. Elmer Lewis is a long time employee.

While this one shop had good operators and changed hands several times, another blacksmith was operating a shop on Birch Street, a block west of Main Street in the business district. Hellick Knutson had learned his trade at Blair and Independence and erected the building in 1903 and carried on a business for 44 years. Besides the regular trade he was also a manufacturer of wagons and sleighs, the latter having unique features greatly appreciated by users.

From this information one can realize that Strum was well served in this important trade. Forging iron, plow share sharpening, shoeing horses and repair of all kinds were everyday tasks for these men. It was, and is, a rugged trade and always demanded physical strength and durability. A story came to light about an extremely powerful man employed by Knutson at one time. Andrew Sheffield was his name. The other part of the tale concerns a mule who, while being shod, had developed a habit of shifting a good part of her weight on to the smith. Andrew disliked this very much and, it is told, one time when "Topsy" went into her act, Sheffield took a deep breath and threw the mule on her back, held and completed the job while she was in that position. Try that sometime!

1880 Statistics

Whether the following information was collected as part of the 1880 census is unknown but it became available as result of about 40 years in collecting interesting notes about Trempealeau County.

Vocations and Professional People Census in 1880

Farm Operators	2213	Clergyman	20
Renters	443	Dr. or Dentist	14
Hired men (farm)	1263	Lawyers	15

Barbers	2	Lumber	3
Hotel or cafe	18	Insurance	4
Teachers	81	Mercantile clerks	52
Gen merchants	20	Livery	9
Saloons	20	Mail carriers	3
Grocers	13	Carpenters	65
Hardwares	9	Masons	6
Dry goods	17	Saw Mills	6
Bankers	2	Blacksmiths	47

Coopers	6	Butchers	14
Carriage Makers	11	Tailors	13
Harness makers	14	Dressmakers	15
Shoe makers	23	Manufacturers	2
Millers	24	RR workers	19
Brewers	3		

Although several weekly papers were published there is no count. Note also, only two bankers who would lend money, only two barbers to trim beards and rural mail routes

Mill Dams

Early in this story there is mention of first settlers walking considerable distances to have a sack of wheat ground into flour. Later these people patronized neighbors who had constructed a mill wheel, dammed a creek to furnish power and set up a gear box to turn a pair of mill stones for producing a reasonably good product, saving time and long trips. There were several of these small mills around this area, some quite well located on good steams and with operators that could produce a fair product.

A considerable amount of water came down the four mile Johnson Valley stream and at one time wheat and other small grain were ground at four locations in that valley. One can imagine the havoc raised by heavy rains and high water but it seemed the operators took that in stride.

Per Hanson Bjornstad lived in section 33 (now the Guenther place) further upstream of these operations. His mill was not large but the spillway is best remembered because of its fluted construction that left many trout lying thereon.

Esten Johnson Dahl lived a half mile below Bjornstad and had set up a pair of millstones soon after settling in 1868. Nothing much was heard about his grinding operation but his blacksmith shop and forge were well known and much mention was made of a particular healing salve produced in his kitchen. He was an influential man, housed innumerable immigrants, served on the Sumner town board and was active in forming the first church here.

The third mill belonged to the old civil war veteran Sam Hogue and was located down-

were 20 odd years in the future. The number of carpenters is noteworthy. Trempealeau and Arcadia had the only breweries we know of. Plenty of lawyers. The blacksmith trade was a good one in those early days and rural schools seemed to attract teachers. Wheat was an important cash crop and required lots of help. No grain binders yet, only reapers - hand fed separators and just a few steam engines for power.

stream a few rods from where the creek crosses the south line of section 20. He operated at that place a few years but later purchased land closer to the river and constructed a large dam and the necessary power equipment a short way upstream from the present railroad right-of-way which was laid out several years later. This was a fairly large and stable installation and business continued several years until the Eleva mill, four miles downstream and the Linderman mill near Osseo secured the bulk of this trade.

Local wheat was not of the desired quality for making good flour, it could not compare with grain from the more arid western states. How good were the operators? One can only guess. We do know they filled a decided void in the early communities. A good operator could mill 25 bushels of wheat an hour on a pair of 18" stones. The charge was usually one bushel for every eight sent through the mill.

A heavy rain washed out Hogue's mill and dam. The gears and castings are said to be buried in the old spillway. The dikes are clearly visible today. Ice was sawed on this dam every winter for years and sold about the village. Someday somebody will restore this picturesque dam, excavate and install a wheel and the gears and save some energy that might otherwise require a cost.

A very unusual use for a waterwheel by a very unusual man came to light after the list of stone mill wheels had been completed. A. H. Klick owned land and lived just north of the railroad right-of-way at the east end of the present air strip. He raised bees and sold honey, lots of it. In fact Mr. Klick shipped a

whole carload of the sweet stuff from Strum to an eastern buyer one time. He was a mechanically inclined fellow and built a small dam on the creek that came through his property and constructed a small flume with a proper sized waterwheel that powered his honey extractor. Present day operators would likely have an

electric line built, expensive motors running, a power bill due every month. Not Mr. Klick. A flick of a wooden handle turned water from the spillway into the flume, the water wheel began turning and in a minute he had power for the extractor.

The Lutheran Church

It seems that every pioneer settlement had a church organization within a very short time. As the first people here were New Englanders we could expect a Methodist adherence and old records of that group at Mondovi show that a circuit riding pastor of that faith included Hamlin in his travels. The year was 1859 and it can be safely assumed the newly constructed school building on Isaac Webster's land served as meeting place.

The influx of Norwegian settlers during the late 60's and early 70's resulted in formation of a Lutheran congregation on January 7, 1873. Members of this group had barely secured roofs over their heads by that date although at

least two pastors had conducted worship at the Esten Johnson Dahl residence. Many settlers had walked over the ridges east into northern Elk Creek where a congregation was already established. A Norwegian pastor, Lars Sherven, served that area and moved here in the spring of 1873.

Norwegians, once they had immigrated, had a great number of divisions in their faith. The old country's state Lutheran Church had been dictatorial in many respects and nearly all their pastors had opposed any thought of emigration. Once here and beyond reach of the numerous demands of the old church many settlers were attracted to a more liberal atmo-



The original St. Paul's Lutheran Church with Pastor C. J. Helsem & family. Since the church was renovated in 1902 its appearance can be used to date old pictures.



United Lutheran Church, Strum, Wis.

The rebuilt St. Paul's Lutheran Church some years later.

phere. Then, also, a split by pastors over some insignificant doctrine created more serious rifts that in later years evolved into splits with most Norwegian communities having two houses of worship housing separate congregations of the same faith.

In our settlement there was no dispute concerning doctrine that caused local division. Several members of that first organization wanted a place of worship. Others preferred to wait a few years. The result was that in 1877 the St. Paul's Norwegian Lutheran Congregation was formed which included members from an older settlement of Norwegians from the Big Creek area. The site for their building, the very first within present village boundaries, was on the Carter Creek Road north of the river. A. J. Lyons donated enough land for the church and cemetery. Members acted quickly. Organization took place the last days of February and an adequate building was ready for a first worship service on May 18, 1877. Years later older people mentioned often that their building was the first with a belfry in the Beef



The West Beef River Lutheran Church which was built in 1915.



A Sunday morning service in 1915. Note the uncompleted West Beef River Church belfrey and construction work on the new parsonage.



An undated, unidentified photo taken during a funeral in St. Paul's. Note that the men are on one side and the women on the other. Also note the women's hats.

River Valley. A conservative group, later aligned with the Norwegian Synod, erected a building nearer the center of the township about five years later. The West Beef River cemetery marks this place.

A large scale remodeling was performed on the St. Paul's building in 1902. After much debate the Norwegian Synod group voted to move into the village and erected the brick building on Elm Street in 1915. In 1955 the two groups, identical in their beliefs, voted to merge and formed the present Immanuel Lutheran congregation. A new education building was completed in 1959 and a general remodeling took place in time for the centennial observance in 1973.

About the time of the Lutheran doctrinal split during the late 80's, a free faith movement attracted several members of this community. These families erected a building and at present belong to the Assembly of God movement.

The Unity Cooperative Creamery Company



The new Unity Coop Creamery building built in 1912.

Wheat was a quick cash crop when the first furrows were turned back in the early 1870's. For several years it commanded a fair price but when heavy yields of better western grain filled the markets local settlers began viewing the cow with a favorable eye.

Cattle inventories were small in those days. The first assessment for Unity in 1878 showed a total of only 491 cloven hoofed animals. An interesting note reveals over 3700 in the same township about 90 years later. There is good reason for this first low figure. Settlers were breaking up new land as quickly as possible and milk for family use which was also made into butter and cheese was the sole purpose for having a cow or two. Also, barbed wire had yet to be introduced. There were therefore no fences and annual town meetings always had a P. B. Williams resolution quoting a law that required a herder be with grazing cattle and

that such animals be penned securely at night. The resolution always passed, usually unanimously. Stray cattle were a problem in those days.

Sometime during the early 1880's when these first settlers, especially the Norwegians, could draw a few relaxed breaths, they heard rumors regarding the sale of milk for making cheese and the sale of cream for butter manufacturing. There were no farm magazines available those days. News came slowly, rumors just moved. But local residents were soon aware of this new possibility. Women of nearly every household churned butter so it was natural that this product attracted initial interest. A private buttermaking effort had begun in Arcadia sometime after 1883 and a couple of years later a cooperative was making butter near Ettrick. Handling of milk, however, was a touchy business. At first cream for making butter was

separated from milk by cooling the latter and then skimming the richer part off the top. Pick-ups were usually made by route wagons twice weekly. The collection man had several wood covered galvanized 30 gallon cans as final recepticals but there was also a smaller can into which the patrons' cream was poured, measured with a stick-gauge, and credit given.



Anton Rognlien and wife. Rognlien was an early president of the Unity Coop Creamery.

This era was a significant time in the milk industry. There was no way a creamery operator or collection man could know the exact value of a patron's cream. There was no method of knowing whether a patron had skimmed his cooled milk carefully or in a haphazard manner. This chancy situation continued until Stephen Babcock, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, perfected his butter fat tester in 1890.

As were many others, local people were interested in establishing a butter factory. Lars Christianson is holder of a receipt for

payment of a creamery share of \$10.00, given to his grandfather Johannes by Olé Kittleson who apparently was the treasurer. The date is March, 1888. It is fairly safe to assume that erection of two small buildings and the assembly of butter making equipment took place that year. The operation must have been short lived. Perhaps it was the problem mentioned above, maybe the problem was the market. 1889 was the year N. C. Foster was heading down the valley with his railroad crew, a project in which all had a stake and wholehearted interest. In any event the Strum Creamery (as it was assessed) closed operation in 1891.

It was about this time that most everybody was busy planning to move across the river nearer the newly laid railroad track. Post-master Ole Kittleson was one of these men and had obtained a new partner named Hans Willumson. The latter was impressed by the economic role a creamery could play in a community, secured control of the equipment, established some cream routes, hired a butter-maker and began operation as an individual. This continued for a year or so whereupon he called farmers to a meeting and gave them his established enterprise, market and all. The farmers were happy and elected Nels Hagestad, who operated a skimming station in Big Creek, president and Even Holte secretary. Prices paid seemed to vary from 5 cents to 16 cents per pound of butterfat. No records of volume or markets are available but an interesting antidote regarding the buttermaker is worthy of mention. It is noted in minutes that this gentleman had a liking for strong liquor which was little appreciated by the temperate community. A strongly worded message (in Norwegian) was delivered: "either change habit or there would be other change." Next month appears a new name as operator. It seems his predecessor had fallen into the churn. An intolerable situation.

The business was nearly broke about 1903 but weathered the storm. Anton Rognlien had succeeded as president. Paul Motzau followed him and in 1912 a new block building was erected south of the river near a railroad spur.

Cost of the building was \$2400.00. Gilbert Dahl and Christ Thompson were the contractors.

During these years a questionable change had taken place regarding cream delivery for the manufacture of good quality butter. Farmers had purchased individual milk separators permitting them to make deliveries at longer intervals and buttermakers were receiving cream that had soured far beyond redemption. Officers at the local creamery did little to change this practice and it continued even after the manufacture of cheese began about 1922 when daily deliveries of cooled milk were necessary.

Manufacture of casein succeeded cheese about 1929 and judging by later happenings the directors were paying patrons too well during these years. A time of reckoning came in 1931. At a special meeting of new directors, Minor Goss, an Albion farmer, was elected manager. The depression was at its height (or low) and drastic measures were necessary. Minute books are not available but help was probably found in a lower price for milk and cream, plus lower wagers for the hired help. The manager obtained approval to switch from coal to wood as boiler fuel. One can imagine the critical farm economy when a great number of patrons were willing to deliver a 4' by 8' cord of wood at \$2.50. Ten cords was the maximum allotment for each patron.

Palmer A. Lee, later county treasurer, had been elected secretary and his first entry in the new minute book was dated February 19, 1934. Twenty-six cents was paid for butterfat in milk for the coming month. Goss mentioned later the figure was down to 16 cents within a couple of years, or about 56 cents per hundred pounds of 3.5% milk.

A word about records, especially minute books, is in order. Without accurate records it is virtually impossible to reconstruct any reference, any story, in later years. Such books will be important to posterity and should have safe community depository where they will be available to future students. No records are available on which to base any

report of creamery operations during 1932 and 1933, but beginning with the mentioned 1934 date, minutes of all annual, regular and special meetings of stockholders and directors are documented. Following Palmer A. Lee, E. N. Kleven, John Hammer, Melvin Christianson, John Alf and Simon Wold served as secretaries of the Unity Co-operative Creamery Co. All kept good records.

Besides the acute economic depression throughout the nation, this part of the mid-west underwent a severe drouth during the early part of 1934. No rain fell until June, dairy herds were decimated, hay was very scarce but enough moisture came in time to help a fair corn crop. The creamery paid 28 cents for butterfat in milk delivered in June. By 1935 the creamery had gone back to cheese manufacturing. The hired help had taken a real pay cut during the early 1930's and records show Art Rosenbaum was given a raise to \$75.00 per month as cheesemaker. Willard Gunderson was raised to \$90.00 per month as buttermaker. The price of milk for May, 1935 was 28 cents, the highest in many months.

By 1936 42 cents was paid for each pound of butterfat which would be \$1.47 per cwt. of 3.5% milk. But this price was down to 35 cents in 1938 and the next year was only slightly better. In 1940 the board decided to sever their connection with the Land O' Lakes co-operative and find another market which resulted in several changes during the next years. Use of wood for the boiler ended in early 1940. The price paid patrons had increased to \$4.00 per cord but only 5 cords could be furnished by each contributor. It was an unusual year for other reasons. Milk was down to 33 cents in the early months, rose to 36 cents during summer and ended at 41 cents in December. Casein was being manufactured instead of cheese. Milk prices rose from 37 cents in early 1941 to 60 cents by December. Whole milk was being sold to a Jim Falls concern. WWII years did not bring any great increase in milk prices to patrons from the creamery. 75 cents was about the highest paid but a government subsidy was being received by the dairy farmer. The hauling of refrigerated milk to southern

markets by large tank wagons affected area milk product manufacturing to some extent but a continual increase in dairy cow population brought volume up. In 1945 additional help was hired so that each man could have one day off per week. Heretofore, a seven day work week had governed.

The price of milk fluctuated greatly during the next few years. \$1.26 had been paid in 1946. This figure dropped to \$0.80 in 1949, upped to \$0.90 in 1953. Equity reserves up to 1944 were paid in 1948. Directors voted themselves \$2.00 for regular monthly meetings and \$1.00 for a special call. In July, 1948 it was decided to quote the price of milk per hundred weight, computed at 3½% butterfat, with a \$.07 differential. The next payment was based at \$3.12 per cwt. Through the next two decades prices rose steadily, \$3.35 in 1965, \$3.65 in 1966, and in 1970, \$4.65 was paid for milk delivered in cans and \$4.80 for bulk delivery. The last figure in the minute book, dated February 20, 1975, 41 years after the first entry, was \$6.69 for can delivery, \$6.84 for bulk.

The era of small creameries had seen many closings following the World War II years. Changes from manufacturing of dairy products to whole milk sales seemed inevitable and the change from can delivery to bulk pick up moved steadily. The scene had changed locally. From twice a week pick ups by wagon and 30 gallon containers with milk being measured by

the inch to shiny insulated tanks equipped with high priced cooling apparatus, then disposed to any number of speedy, clean delivery trucks whose mileage serving patrons is astronomical.

The Unity Creamery Company is gone, but one thing is certain. Throughout about 90 years of about every kind of imaginable problem characteristic of the dairy industry it persevered. There have been many men who gave years of service to this creamery. Beginning with merchant Hans Willumson who straightened the first problems, the first officers, Nels Hagestad and secretary Even Holte, a patron of 50 years. Old timers had a party for Anton Rognlien, an early president, on his retirement. His successor was Paul Moltzau during whose term the block building was constructed. Buttermaker Fred Hagen deserves mention, and finally Minor Goss and Willard Gunderson. Minor assumed the management of a practically defunct creamery during the darkest depression times, banks were closed, markets were bankrupt and farmers dependent on meager milk checks. For 27 years he steered and held to a course that erased a large deficit and put the creamery in a position of equity reserves and gave a satisfactory price for patrons' products, which is about all a co-op can do. Willard Gunderson began work as a helper in 1927 and continued for 45 years, 38 of these as buttermaker and plant superintendent. The length of uninterrupted service is an indication of satisfied patrons.

The Postal System

Strum has had a dozen different postmasters since Ole Kittleson hung out a shingle on February 20, 1885, informing the few residents that he was postmaster and "Strum" was the return address. He was followed by Ole Nysveen who serve three times for a total of approximately 22 years. The officers and the date they began service follows:

Ole Kittleson	February 20, 1885
Ole Nysveen	January 11, 1888
Ole Thomasgaard	June 25, 1889
Ole O. Nysveen	April 16, 1890
John A. Klungseth	December 14, 1897

Ole O. Nysveen	January 9, 1903
Claude E. Burton	July 22, 1915
William H. Call	February 17, 1925
Elvin E. Strand	September 10, 1927
Ralph E. Lyon	May 27, 1936
Clarence P. Call	July 1, 1944
Gerald Bergerson	July 29, 1949
Clarence P. Call	April 5, 1957
Forrest Spangberg	August 5, 1958
Clarence P. Call	August 26, 1960
Douglas Runkel	February 16, 1961

Rural Free Delivery began in 1900 on a route serving farmers north of town up to a rural

postal station at Nix Corners. Hogue was the carrier. In 1905 Ben Borreson began serving route 2 toward the south. Rural Free Delivery had a sceptical reception among rural people.

Months and even years passed before many would let mail be deposited in an easily opened box. However, efficient handling of mail changed this feeling.



Ole Nysveen's little Post Office located south of the tracks on the west side of Main Street. Picture was taken about 1907.

Civil War Veterans

Locations

Russell Bower - section 15 at Hamlin
Sam Hogue - section 20
Chris Swendby - section 30
Jack Carter - section 18
Rice Brothers - section 29
Wingads, John and Fred - section 24
St. Clair Jones - section 23
Peg Leg Lampman - section 11

John Springer - section 15
William Tomlinson - just east of Elva cemetery
Bendickson - north of Eleva
Joseph Cooper - section 4
Ole Severson - Spanish-American War vet
Ole Harrison in Eleva
T. L. Pratt - section 5 (Giles O'Dell place)
Paul Moe - Mort Moe place
Dan Dutter - section 15

The Bank

The First State Bank of Strum was organized on December 12, 1904 and began operating in January of the following year. H. A. Warner of White Bear, Minnesota was the first president. William Peterson was vice-president, J. A. Nelson, cashier. The board of directors were the above and Sivert Rekstad, J. A. Call,

H. N. Robbe and T. C. Johnson. Robbe became cashier a few years later.

The bank opened with a capitol of \$10,000. It was a welcomed day in the growing community that had struggled without this service since the first settlement. By 1917 total assets were \$241,000.00 of which \$179,000.00 or



Most of these men were Civil War veterans and posed in Eleva around 1900. Most are unidentified, but William Tomlinson, St. Clair Jones and Jim Grant are believed to be in the back row. Knute Holtan, John Springer, T. L. Pratt and Sever Nickolson are somewhere in the front row. There may be a Tom McKernon in this picture, a Confederate veteran who lived in Pleasant Valley.

74% was loans and discounts, proving the bank was active in the loan business. As most banks they followed the advice of larger big city banks and invested in inflated farm mortgages with the result that losses were frequent. The stock market crash in October, 1929 with the following market deflation and slowing of the economy had a great effect on these small local banks. There were no receiving agencies of the government that could have held questionable collateral for a limited time to tide pressed financial institutions until time would permit reforming. A bank is the economic balance wheel of a community. Around and through it local business revolves and on its stability rests much confidence. Many people's trust here on earth is invested in its continuity. When a bank fails, especially in those days of no deposit insurance, there was

more lost than merely hope and trust. Depositors up in years saw their security gone. Remember, old age pensions were yet unheard of. Social Security as we know it was a radical plan to be proposed four years later. Banks closed steadily after the market crash but none thought it would happen here. Directors closed the First State Bank of Strum for business in August, 1931.

It was a weird, unforgettable day even to a twenty-year-old with no deposit. And as the years passed my realization grew as to the seriousness of the happening and how very little a person of that young age actually knows of life's problems. I had began working for H. George Peterson, the Ford dealer, in March of that year. Work began at 7:00 A.M. and in my case was preceded by a two mile walk. Sivert Rekstad, bank president, and I

were fairly well acquainted and I met him that morning about 6:30 outside the MWA hall. My "good morning" went unanswered and I wondered why he was coming from town at that time of day. The answer was not long in coming. Milly Eide on his morning milk delivery drove by the door a few minutes later with a call, "we can't talk to anyone this morning." I was a little puzzled by this remark, but when H. George hurried into the place a few minutes later, the air cleared. "The bank is closed," he said, and left. Throughout the day autos would speed into town in a

cloud of dust. Occupants would hurry across the street, read the sign on the door and slowly leave. Merchant Joe Mathison provided the only bright spot that day. A sign appeared in his store window, "Your credit is good here."

Liquidation of the bank's assets dragged on for several years. The last were sold at a sheriff's sale in 1937 for a couple of thousand dollars. Officers at the time of the closing were H. N. Robbe, Armen Fredericks, cashier, N. M. Rognlien, J. J. Dahl, Even Holte and J. P. Hanson.

A Contrasting Side of a Bank Closing

Banks closings came frequently during the early thirties and they were tragic happenings for many people. Occasionally a story comes about from those events that has a lighter vein.

This particular tale involved Martin Dahl, manager of the Farmers Store Company with International Machinery Sales of Strum and Pete Skolus, owner of a general store at Eleva. Both men were public spirited fellows, both good backers of their respective towns and ready for any opportunity to badger the other. It seemed that Dahl had met Skolus shortly after the Eleva bank closed its doors sometime in 1930 and mentioned that he had a good mower in his stock of implements that he would bring down river so that grass could be

properly mowed in the streets of Skolus' town.

A year later the Strum bank was unable to open its doors and Skolus had his inning. He called the Farmer's Store. Martin Dahl was out, but since Skolus' call concerned machinery, the line was connected to Walt Enger, the implement salesman who knew nothing of the first exchange between the two. Walt was happy to receive the call although it didn't "amount to much" according to Skolus, "but you can tell Martin to come down and get his mower now." Not busy at the time, Walt cranked up the red International delivery truck, drove to Eleva and announced to the astonished Skolus, "I'm here for the mower."

S. S. Luce

S. S. Luce, publisher of the Galesville Transcript during the 1860's-1870's, had a yen for composing poetry on most any subject or scene that moved him. The writings made sense and the following lets us know that he traveled through this "northern bound" of Trempealeau County some early day soon after the Civil War. His observations lends credence to the statement that our valley was a passage way for western-bound settlers, all of whom had "weary miles before them lying."

Just when he saw little "Inge's" grave needs no further mention; like countless others she was left on the trail with "little time for sighing." Samuel Luce paints an appealing picture with words.

THE INFANT'S GRAVE

By our county's northern bound
Where a winding stream is flowing
Gnarled oaks are standing 'round
and beneath the wild flowers blowing.

Wild and lonely is the spot;
Wave on wave the prairie swelling;
Where the vision reaches not
Farmer's cot or human dwelling.

There I saw a tiny grave;
Fresh the earth about it lying,
While above the green boughs wave
In the June breeze softly sighing.

Frail the board that marked the bed
Where the little child is sleeping;
Birds are singing overhead,
And beneath the wild vines creeping.

Here, the emigrant his tent
Pitched beside the running water,
Buried, ere he onward went,
Little "Inge Iversdatter."*

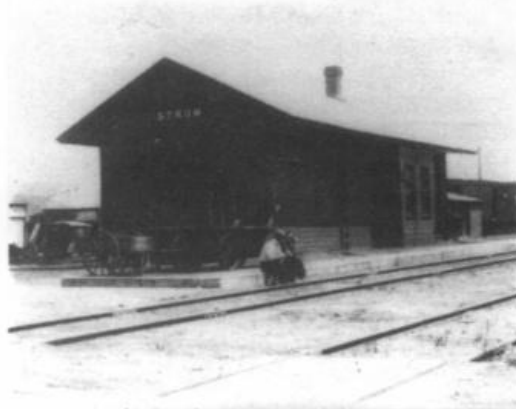
Short the stay for mother's tears,
Weary miles before them lying;
Life's stern duties, hopes and fears
Left but little time for sighing.

Weeping as they bid adieu
To the dear one left behind them,
Lost forever from their view —
Sad the memories that bind them.

* Inge, Iver's daughter

The Depot Agent

The coming of the railroad brought the "agent" into town. He was a prominent man in the railroad's business as he dispatched freight and express, ordered cars, sold passenger tickets, collected freight bills, and above all, he was telegrapher. This service meant much when one realizes that a lone wire strung along the railroad right-of-way was the fastest and only connection with the outside world.



The Depot, circa 1930.

There were several such men in the service of Foster's Spur, however Strum had no depot for at least two years after the first train came through. The railroad first came to Strum during Christmas of 1889, but it was not until a company building at Fairchild was dismantled that materials were provided for the local station at Strum. No one now can remember how local shipments were handled during the interim. Evidence concerning dates and length of service was also unavailable. Most of the men in the following listing, however, were described as involved with the rail-

road service.

Old timers agree that John O'Connel was the first agent. A brusque man in his dealings, he was no admirer of clergymen for some reason and a tale is handed down concerning dealings with a local pastor. It seems a shipment of books was due to a church. Several inquiries had been made and a comment or two about tardy railroad service. When the box finally arrived the crusty O'Connel sent word to hurry because the books were "leaking." Apparently some wine bottles located within the shipment of books had broken.

Belvor was an early agent, Jim McHan another. Chase followed the last named, and a man named Tante succeeded in short order. Tante erected the M. T. Olson house, but is best remembered for a second happening. A young daughter, aged six or seven, died while he was here. He had no connection with the local Lutheran church, or any other it seemed. There was no ordinance governing interment so the little girl was buried outside the front window of his residence. When the railroad required his services at another station, he exhumed the casket and moved it with other furniture to the new location.

Hoffman, a physical giant, had charge in 1917-1918. He contracted influenza while here and died. W. T. Kromroy followed him and served the next thirty-five years. He married Marie Rekstad and together they had a son and a daughter. Kromroy was active in local affairs during those years and did considerable woodworking as a hobby. When he retired, local dispatching was done at Osseo, marking the beginning of the end for railroad service here.



A pose by Strum businessmen about 1910. Very few of these men can now be identified.



This picture was taken May 4, 1954, the day the depot closed. Pictured left to right: Willard Riphenberg, Otto Anderson, Hans Jacobson, Dick Brian, Ted Hulberg, Alvin Strand, Bill Kromroy, Spencer Olson, Fred Williams, Ted Halverson, Mel Olson, Gen Strand, Marshall Robbe, Joe Mathison, Forest Spangberg, Tab Erickson, Jerry Olson, Roy Matson, Art Rosenbaum, Dell Halverson.

Sam Hogue

A person who could relate stories was a noted and well-accepted person in an early day community. There were no phonographs, no radios, no TVs and only an occasional reed organ or fiddle to shorten a long winter evening. A person blessed with a talent for relating a story, whether it be a fantasy or the truth, was a welcome guest to whatever accommodations were available.

Identity of such people pass with generations and a very few tales are preserved that during their time were told and retold for the entertainment of many. One such person lived in this community over a century ago and was the originator of many outlandish stories in which he always played a leading part; only during the last quarter century have they began fading away. So impressive were these tales that any local resident over 80 needs little refreshing to recall this man and his reputation.

Sam Hogue was his name. He was a veteran of the Civil War, owned land and built two milling operations in Johnson Valley. The last was fairly large and the embankments are yet visible about 300 feet south of the railroad right-of-way on the creek that bears the valley name. He circulated petitions that called for formation of the Johnson Valley school in 1870 and was its first clerk. But he was best known and remembered for the ludicrous tall tales he left.

One characteristic of his stories always prevailed: the endings always left the participants in an unusual position or situation which Sam never bothered to solve or explain. Both the telling was always entertaining and unbelievable.

A good example took place in Hans Willumson's store one early spring morning. Snow had fallen and a logger newly returned from a winter in the northern pine woods was telling of an unusually heavy snowfall the crew had experienced that winter. All were impressed and when the man had finished Sam, who had listened respectfully, cleared his throat and those present knew what was coming. Yes, Sam had experienced a heavy snow and of much greater proportion. While

working as timber foreman he was traveling a day's journey between two points when a heavy snow came up. He had a cutter and light team and before long it was necessary to break way for the horses. Night came and they were barely half way in the dark timber but he was in good physical shape and kept going until daylight, the snow still swirling down. About mid-afternoon the horses were completely exhausted and Sam was himself about worn out. He knew his goal was nearby so he tied the horses to what he thought was a post and proceeded afoot. The snow began to abate so he found the place very shortly, ate a big meal and sank into a deep sleep. A chinook wind arose during this sleep which lasted two days. All the snow had melted when he awakened. The horses were his first concern and imagine his surprise when he found what he had thought was a post was a church steeple and the team was hanging forty feet above ground. Some snow!

The lion hunt in Johnson Valley, however, was judged by oldtimers to be the ultimate and best remembered story Sam delivered. The characters and site were local, the legend of usual fancy and the ending typical.

It seems that Esten Johnson Dahl, the valley's first settler, had been losing several valuable head of young stock one of those first years. The Indians living up the valley denied having any connection with the matter and refused to hunt the varmit after they had seen the leavings. After finding a fine young animal mutilated one morning, Esten sent word down the valley to Sam that he must have help and fast. Sam responded.

They determined that a lion had done the damage, that it had come from the brushy area near the bluff to the west and that quick action was necessary to ward off further loss. So they loaded Sam's civil war gun with a heavy charge and headed westward.

Their search was short. The den was quickly located in one of the deep valleys, but tracks indicated the beast was out on another forage. They decided to hide nearby and await the lion's return. A long time went by and as Sam

tells it, Esten was an impatient man. He felt that with the animal gone they could enter the den and learn how such beasts lived. At least he would like to enter while the opportunity existed. Sam protested but to no avail. Esten was determined and crawled into the hole and entered the den. He had barely done so when Mr. Lion came bounding through the brush, slipped by Sam and ran into the hole. Sam barely had time to grab the tail of the beast,

brace his feet and hang on. From the depths of the den came Esten's cry, "What makes it so dark in here, Sam?" To which Sam had a classic reply that lived through the decades: "If I let this tail go you'll soon find out."

As usual the story was typical entertainment with a typical Sam Hogue ending. As both Sam and Esten lived to a ripe old age it would be interesting to know how they escaped their precarious situation.

"Curio"

Every small town has at some time or another some resident dubbed as a "character". Strum has had several. It is possible in a larger community with a great number of people they would pass unnoticed. But here where any difference from native behavior patterns is observed and raises cause for comment — we have a "character".

"Curio" Pete Olstad was such a man. In the first place his early adult life was spent in travel, part of the time as a gold miner, a great part as a circus barker and just plain travel. He was born on the home farm about four miles east of town in the year 1868, and lived there until about the age of twenty-five when he decided the place offered little challenge. Montana and the west coast was of interest a few years, and when mining of gold caused the Alaska rush, "Curio" was in the forefront.

How much mining he did was never learned. His headquarters were at Nome where he worked some time for the later-to-be well-known boxing promoter, Tex Rickard. While there he became acquainted with authors Jack London and Rex Beach who were about the same age. Another man he often mentioned was Robert Service.

Rickard was a hunter in leisure hours and it seemed "Curio" had charge of the saloon during the owner's absence. No doubt he had charge of card games and in after hours would occasionally demonstrate a few tricks of that trade. He undoubtedly acquired the name "Curio" while in Alaska. He brought back his "gold" in the form of some large dinosaur bones that became part of an exhibit he

showed coast to coast in later years. 'Tis said that in his cups one time he admitted winning them from some luckless miner in a poker game.

Pictures of him about that time show a very striking man. Over six feet in height, straight, long-flowing hair, a well-trimmed mustache and a goatee exemplified his physical appearance. He also possessed a commanding voice and used good English, complementing a fine appearance he made for many years as a circus barker. "Curio" was a well-read, intelligent man, a world traveler who could entertain an audience.

During circus travels he became acquainted with William Cody (or Buffalo Bill, as he came to be known), and for several years traveled with The Wild West Show as the owner's double. "Curio's" appearances usually were in the parades and other instances where the audience was at a little distance. With western clothing, the hair, mustache and goatee he was an exact stand-in except he was a little larger in stature. He made two trips to England as part of that troupe.

Shortly after his return from Alaska he purchased a large tent which he used to display dinosaur bones in the off-season. He showed them at fairs, chatauquas and theatres when not connected with circus life.

I was about fifteen and attending the Buffalo County Fair when his booming voice rose above the forenoon din. "I will now begin my lecture," he called, as he strode back and forth on a ramp in front of his tent, entreating would be customers to the "gigantic, unbelievable" show. People streamed in, intrigued

by this magnetic personality of a man who also looked the part. I, of course, had seen him early in the summer as a strawberry planter and was not enchanted. Besides, I had no quarter to spend. As I passed the tent in mid afternoon on one occasion, I noticed Pete was not around but the tent was open giving everyone a free view of the mastadon remains. On my way to the train I passed the open doors of Aase's saloon that afternoon and there saw "Curio" hanging unto the end of the bar. During his travels he had developed an unquenchable thirst, and business had been good that day.

During the early days of the depression I was secretary of the Commercial Club and saddled with the responsibility of securing a free act for some promotion. An inquiry for a balloon ascension directed to an Indiana firm brought a reply with an astronomical price and a paragraph inquiring if "Curio" Pete Olstad was alive and thriving. The individuals went on to identify themselves as Alaskan acquaintances.

The friendship with Tex Rickard resulted in his having good tickets for every boxing show in which Tex had a part. "Curio" had been an announcer at the saloon boxing shows in Nome during the long Alaskan winters.

Fire at Kromroy's

Hearing older people recount happenings and problems of years long ago give many a feeling that our forebearers were as occupied as we in preventing an overwhelming of daily chores and events that burden everyday life. Where our grandparents had a major problem we can counter with another of equal dimension but one hazard that has changed little is the threat of fire. Theirs was the day of wood fires for home heating, usually with an unlined chimney of brick that developed cracks over a period of years. Rare was a house with a water supply or any kind of fire protection.

A chimney fire was frequent and the newest home was subject as readily as an old house. A burnout of soot could come any day when a strong wind provided draft and a vacuum to start the blaze. All this brings us to a few

His travels may have lasted 25 years because after the mid-twenties he returned to his small garden farm, called "Kamp-Kill-Kare" and raised strawberry plants. Naturally they had a characteristic trade name of "Mastadon". Occasionally there would be a short trip to show the bones or to meet some old acquaintance through Eau Claire.

He was respected as a card player. The sleight of hand, card rippling and dealing must have been the result of countless hours of practice. Clynt Olsen, a local bar operator, remembers him for another reason, "Curio" came to town for supplies about every ten days or so and on those occasions he always made an appearance at Clynt's place for one shot of "the cheapest whiskey" you have. A game of dice to decide a double or nothing payment was always made, however, and in the seventeen years Clynt owned the bar, "Curio" won every time.

He ended life tragically. It seemed a long epiglottis caused discomfort, requiring his doctor to remove a portion. The soreness instilled the feeling that it was malignant, and although he was assured otherwise, the fear remained. He left a note for step-daughter Minnie. With the usual flourish "Curio" signed, "you will find me in the barn."

words of a true happening in this town and a practical lesson in fire fighting by two active men.

The year was 1933, a cold, windy, cloudy winter day not fit for man or beast. The village fire fighting equipment was meagre, an old hand-powered pumper (with no water supply) and a 30 gallon chemical tank mounted on two buggy wheels. During cold weather the chemical tank was stored at the Ford garage. It had one disadvantage. Once activated it must empty itself and be refilled, but it was often stated that Strum never lost a building while the red tank was on wheels. Sometimes it was not but that's another story.

Back to the tale. As we said, all this occurred on a miserable day. Deep snow lay everywhere, streets were unplowed except for main

street's center lane and the only activity of note around the town was the continual whist game at Orville Thompson's (Tommie's) corner restaurant.

Tommy was fire chief and headed a group of the village's able bodied men who were usually absent during the day cutting cordwood at a small wage. Those were depression days . . . remember. In event of fire, just about everybody pitched in. The chief's main duty was to bring the red tank, unify the attack and decide if and when to spray.

As we admit for the third time, it was a bitter day, business was slow and Tommy had just dealt a new hand of whist when the door blew open and a telephone operator yelled, "Fire at Bill Kromroy's", whisked a shawl back over her head and scooted back to her duties across the street.

Whist was suspended but the players were far too old to fight fire. Tommy donned winter gear, including rubber footwear because some word indicated a roof fire.

As he told afterward, he had debated sounding the fire bell but the depth of snow would have required time to cross and no one could have heard the bell in the day's hard wind. Tommy headed for the door, picked up a tea kettle of water simmering on his heater, placed it carefully on the front seat of his Model T and headed south. No flashing bubble-topped police car led the way. There was no siren, just a cold Model T engine doing

its best to attain 20 mph.

There were flames roaring out of the chimney of the low rambler. A northwest wind brought the fire straight off the top flue unto the roof and shingles were already burning. Agile Bill Christianson, then a young man, had seen the blaze, reported to the central office and had a ladder ready and in position. No time was wasted. With the tea kettle carefully balanced the chief scaled the ladder and reached the critical spot. Because of the swerving winds the fire did not have a good start, but made it difficult to stay on the roof. In the meantime, Christianson entered the house and attacked the fire through the bottom of the chimney and was doing effective work. On the roof, water from the tea kettle was applied in dribbles where need seemed most. As the blaze was dampened from below, the roof fire came under control and in a half-hour danger was over. An excellent bit of work by two active men.

The story continues - Tommy returned to the cafe, removed his outer clothing, refilled and replaced the water kettle and attended to other necessary chores, sat down, picked up his whist hand and after a quick appraisal - passed.

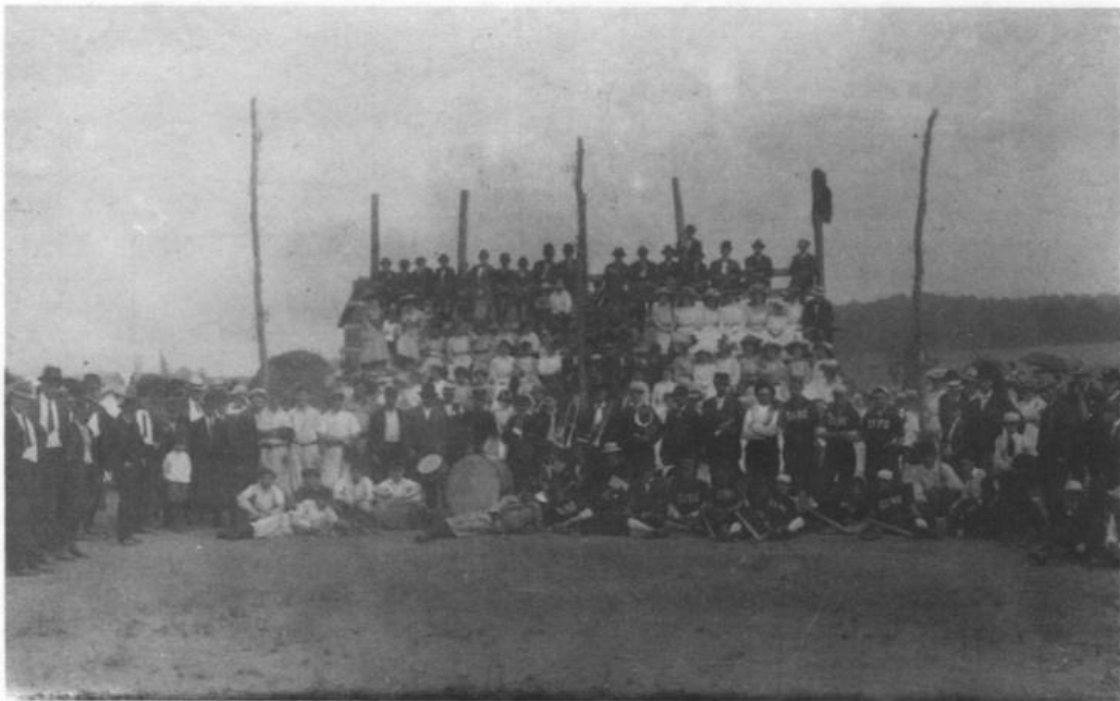
In weeks following when the chief was pressed regarding the happenings of that afternoon, his only comment was, "It isn't the amount of water poured on a building, it's the part that reaches the fire that produces results."

Baseball

Time was when every small town sported a baseball team. The class of play could hardly be rated but the enthusiasm was there, possibly because there was a personal promotion by those participating and also because at the same time it taught some responsibility. Feeder systems for town teams came from coulee nines who very often ran leagues of their own. Those days were a far cry from present day youth whose play is supervised from the first day of school and who, as a result, have a difficult time organizing their personal recreation hours, to say nothing of obtaining and caring for equipment or the grounds. True,

the class of play is better but the responsibility of passed days taught lessons unobtainable under present supervised play.

But back to baseball, a forgotten sport in these small towns. As stated, if the youth wished to play there was first a field, purchase of balls, bats, gloves and some sort of uniform. There were hours of work putting a playing field in shape, some promotion to raise money for equipment, advertising and schedules for games and then a matter of selecting and training talent. The very last of these could involve difficult decisions because the hardest workers at making a team go were sometimes



July 4, 1911. The Strum team (the Cubs) played a team from Eau Claire.

the least talented athletes. But, as a coach would often learn, these same boys could make a business move successfully in later years.

The first team of any note was playing in 1911. Members were young farm boys who had practiced and played together for a couple of years. Finding competition was not difficult but those were horse and buggy days and travel to neighboring towns for games required time. The roads had a one-word description - horrible. An old member of that team related that a game had been scheduled with Osseo, at that city. Two team members had bicycles and it was agreed that eight players would begin walking while two would ride the bicycles a half mile, leave them and begin walking. The eight would reach the bikes, two would ride the next half mile, leave them and thus proceed, each in his turn. At that time what is now Highway 10 followed forty acre fence lines up through the sandy prairie, requiring both leg strength and time to reach the up river town. The team arrived in time for

the game, a little leg weary but full of enthusiasm and ready to do their best.

The 1911 Nine, a winning team, played on the present Strum Millwork grounds. A picture of their rustic bleachers, band members, team and a Fourth of July crowd appears elsewhere in this book. The battery was Ed Rognlien and Marshal Moltzau.



Two teams of the 1930's. Front row (L-R): Roy Matson, Forrie Spangberg, Gordon Kuhl, Gordon Gullicksrud, Sonny Skogstad, Clifford Swendby. Back row (L-R): Bud Rice, Jerry Olson, Jerome Johnson, Durwood Hogue (from Park Falls), Orville Thompson, Orville Nelson.



Front row (L-R): Gordon Kuhl, Norval Matson, Clifford Swendby, Forrie Spangberg, Orville Nelson, Jerome Johnson. Back row: Rolf Skoyan, Gen Strand, Sleepy Bradison, Roy Matson, Odell Bergerson, Orville Thompson.

Baseball died for a brief time but after World War One another group was playing on the same grounds. Long John Rognlien served up left-handed curves and slants. Jesse Hogue was the catcher.

About 1924 a field was laid out south of Hawthorn Street and was in use for some twenty years. One of the better teams to use that field came up in 1934 with Gordon Gullicksrud and Gordon Kuhl as battery. They won the Dairyland League championship and furnished a majority of the players that beat the Eau Claire Northern League entry. In 1935 they played off for the Western Wisconsin league championship. Odell Bergerson was pitcher.

World War Two shortened available talent but immediately after peace had been reached the boys were at it again. And again as in prior years, there was little aid or supervision

from the outside. The young men of the town organized and promoted baseball themselves.

The 1948 team won a league championship and then applied for and secured entry in the better Western Wisconsin League. They won that championship the next year. Members and manager Forest Spangberg promoted purchase of land for a permanent field and parking space the next year. In 1950 they leveled the playing space, constructed seating for a thousand fans and installed lights for night baseball. Interest was high and for the next 15 years the team reputation was well known, the toughest competition from a wide area was played on even terms.

After 1965 small town baseball deteriorated. Motorcycles, golf, WIAA restrictions and labor laws curtailing youth responsibilities all played a part at ending one phase of a most interesting sport.

Music

Three reed organs appeared on Unity Township's first assessment listing back in 1878 so we know the music followed first settlement very closely. How well these instruments were used is anyone's guess, but one can be certain they were more than parlor ornaments. Susanna Fox paid tax on a \$50.00 instrument, but Chairman Williams and Even Evenson had \$75.00 organs. The Williams family had several members with musical ability and Evenson was the first organist at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. As his home Norway area had their first school established when he was 12 one may wonder where he learned to play. Of course those years prior to 1878 must have had a fiddler or two in the area but as none had established a reputation enough to leave a memory, they must have been "just fiddlers".

We mentioned that Evenson was an early organist at St. Paul's Church which was erected in 1877. The West Beef River congregation began building in 1883 and completed their church in 1888. They had no organist those first years. Lars Moe led the singing and used

a large ocarina for setting the pitch. Otto Dahl, son of Anton Dahl, was the first organist, followed by either his brother or Olga Holte. The Dahl brothers gave keyboard instruction up to about 1900.

At St. Paul's there is reason to believe Fred Raney was an early organist followed by Christophine Rekstad and her sister Clara. Dr. Rolofson could play also. Sometime in the late 1880's the United Church adopted a new liturgy and a first attempt at four part choir singing may have begun at that time as such a group was organized to aid the liturgy. Dr. Rolofson was the choir director.

Shortly after the railroad came and the town began some growth, Rhinehardt Albertson moved to Strum. He was a violinist, a very good one, and had several pupils including at least three daughters who inherited much of his talent. An Albertson string quartet performed at various functions in this and surrounding towns. Albertson, who died about 1909, organized a men's band in Strum.

The Strum Ladies Band

Two Albertson daughters married banker Henry Robbe and merchandiser Olof Dahl and their musical interest continued unabated. Together with Mrs. Howard Pace who had moved in from Mondovi, the three women organized a ladies band about 1915. A year later a picture shows 11 members but from then on there was rapid growth in membership. By 1918 the band was recognized as a good band, numbered about 20, and had retained Mr. John Judge of Augusta as director. He played a piccolo and was described as a dignified appearing, able leader. Members often practiced at the Temperance Hall, but when cold weather arrived, the bank lobby was the only heated space available although it was very small for such a large band.

During the early twenties a band stand was erected about on the present Post Office site. Stores and business places were open on Saturday evenings. The band played regularly and the town was filled with shoppers and

visitors who came to hear the ladies perform. Municipalities promoted band picnics those days. Two and three day county fair dates were filled. The group was invited and featured at land sales in nearby communities and won valuable prizes at contests and established a wide reputation as a drawing card. They were not a marching band, but march they did, Memorial Day and July 4th parades - once a three mile hike at La Crosse.

Travel was always a problem; poor automobiles, inexperienced drivers, horrible roads and the inevitable accidents were always a part of out of town dates. No one was ever seriously hurt but there were dunkings, tipovers and late arrivals several times. Old news clippings tell of large crowds, appreciative audiences, and of the ladies being especially mentioned at an Eau Claire event that had 18 bands. The Strum band was moored on a floating band stand. The crowd was estimated at 10,000.

About 1920 the band changed uniforms.



Strum's first all ladies home town band (1916): Front row (L-R): Delia Anderson, Malena Robbe, Lydia Dahl. Second row: Manda Dahl, Gertie Myhers, Clara Rekstad, Blanch Anderson. Third row: Emma Pace, Mrs. Bill Boyd, Mabel Borreson. Missing: Mrs. Leland Hogue.



Strum Ladies Band (1918) Front row (L-R): Manda Dahl, Gladys Lyons, Ethel Robbe, Florence Teeple, Gladys Robbe, Emma Pace. Back Row: Arylie Olson, Celina Olson, Ella Albertson, Malena Robbe, Lydia Dahl, Delia Hogue, Mrs. Mathison, LaVerna Dahl, Ruth Garson, Marie Rekstad, Mrs. Jessie Hogue. Director: John Judge. Guest conductor: Mr. Reese from Winona, Minnesota.

The pleated skirts and middie blouses were switched for a Scottish outfit made by the members. A large vacant room was obtained, sewing machines brought in, material purchases and every seamstress in town was put to work with a result that a classy looking band of 37 members were attired in Scottish plaids.

Out of this number of musicians several small orchestras were organized. Younger members went away to school and older players moved or retired. The Strum Ladies Band had several good years but there was difficulty keeping up the high degree of consistency without regular rehearsals. Besides Mr. Judge, the group had Charles Harris of Chippewa Falls, Frank Smith of Osseo and a Mr. Reese of Winona as directors over a period of ten years. 1926 was the last year of active playing.

CROWD OF 10,000 ATTENDS BIG BAND FESTIVAL AT CARSON PARK

Financial Success Crowns Efforts As Proceeds Total \$528.21

Success crowned the efforts of those responsible for the huge band concert yesterday and total of \$528.21 was collected at the park where it was held yesterday afternoon, it was announced this morning.

Eighteen bands played in the concert, nearly every town and city within a wide radius having a representative band entered in the concert.

Several remarkable musical organizations were heard at the park yesterday, prominent among them being the Strum Ladies Band.

Moored out on the lake on the new floating bandstand, the ladies brought forth rounds of applause from the huge crowds on the island.

A conservative estimate placed the crowd at between 8,000 and 10,000 persons. This is the largest crowd ever to attend a similar event here. A crowd of about

It was a decade of fine entertainment for a great number of people. There was hard work and much sacrifice by the participants and a real story of what can be accomplished when an objective is determined and a co-operative effort is sustained.



One of the last Strum Ladies Bands.

A Train-Auto Collision

There have been several train-automobile collisions on Foster's Fairchild-Mondovi spur, some of them fatal to auto drivers. Whether the train ever hit a horse driver vehicle is unknown although we are certain young blades raced the train in their buggies.

This writer was witness to an early morning collision in 1931 at the Main Street crossing in Strum. It could have ended with serious results but for some quick action by the train engineer.

For some time it had been noticed that the Dahl sisters, living south of town, had been crossing at about the time the 8:05 morning passenger was due from the east. One of the sisters was employed at the Farmers Store Co. and began work at that hour. Comment had been made that these ladies did not take adequate precaution, in fact, seemed unaware of any train. An accident had been predicted not once, but several times if this practice continued.

It was a beautiful summer morning, I remember, and I was busy repairing a tire at the south door of the Ford garage when I heard

the train coming and sounding its usual crossing whistle. Suddenly the whistle began a series of short blasts and a screech caused by locked drivers of the engine rent the air.

The Dahl auto was on the middle of the track when the cow-catcher hit, knocked the auto forward about ten feet and hit it again as the train slowed. The locomotive pushed the auto and had begun rolling it when the backward turn of the drivers halted forward motion.

Of course the racket and crash gathered a large crowd at once and two very frightened women, pale as sheets, crawled out of the wrecked Chevrolet 4 door. The auto had reached the sidewalk, its rolling action was halted and any forward motion by the train would have crushed everything.

The auto was brought into the Ford garage and in the days following, people would view the car and ask, "Is this the car that was hit by the train?" The question became so monotonous that I printed a sign: "Yes, this is the car that was hit by the train."

The Beef River Station

It seems that Osseo is and has been in a favored location when travel in western Wisconsin is considered. Today I-94 graces its edge with autos and freight loads in an unending stream. Autos can cross the state in two or three hours, semi lodes of freight service the entire north-west. East-west traffic from U. S. Highway feeds or separates its share to make Osseo a familiar name to travelers from all directions.

It has nearly always been so. One of the first legislatures of our state empowered a commission of three men to lay out a highway from Sparta via Black River Falls to a place called Eau Claire. No money was provided for improving travel, no dollar was allowed for any bridge. The three men were permitted expenses while laying out a right-of-way between those points on which travel would be permitted at no charge. This highway, if you dare call it that, generated a stage coach line that provided freight, mail and passenger service for nearly twenty years to a sparsely

settled area of the earliest pioneers.

The first freight wagons and the stage coaches that followed graced the outskirts of Osseo. The pace was a little slower and more rough, but at the time it was a necessary service. From the east came a freight line that had a horse exchange at Foster. Another light wagon made semi-weekly trips down the Beef River Valley for a while. In any event, the Osseo area seemed to be a crossroads. The pace was slower and no brightly painted autos with flashing lights to fix the travel rate were needed.

The center of activity was a mile or more northeast of the river fork. A frame building with a sign reading "Beef River Station" and owned by William Silkworth had been erected in early 1855. It served as a stopping place on the Sparta-Eau Claire stage line, providing passengers with food at times. It had available a supply of frontier staples and mail could be left for forwarding by the few early pioneers of

the area.

A half-dozen families lived nearby and may have had partial employment as Silkworth had several interests. He had secured title to the property located in section 2, T24, R7 in March, 1855 through the land office at Eau Claire. Mr. Gordon Hong owns this land at present and found the exact location of the station recently when an addition to his home uncovered original footings.

Silkworth's 1855 operation places him as possibly the first resident of that area and notes of that time fixes him there a year earlier. In any event it was recognized as a stopping place by the legislature when another three man commission was appointed by that body in 1856 to lay out a highway from Fountain City to the "Beef River Station." The building had some size because an early assessment fixes its value at \$1,000.00 when ordinary homes rated a \$200-300 figure. Silkworth was appointed postmaster of Sumner in 1859. Three of his men had preceded him beginning in 1855. The stage coach era ended in 1870. By that time the post office had been moved and the name changed to Osseo. It is noteworthy that Silkworth had a partner named Greene and that their place became known as "bed bug station" during its last years.

The first vehicles on the Sparta-Eau Claire line were light freight wagons. Sometime in the early 1860's the business had been purchased by W. T. Price of Eau Claire. The line was active and he secured some \$2,000 Concord stage coaches. The Sparta to Eau Claire run took 25 hours and cost \$2.00. For awhile the coaches ran each way every day. Price had a stage to Augusta in 1867.

It was a hard ride. A note at the Black River Falls library tells of a discussion regarding punishment for Confederate president Jefferson Davis after his capture. A prominent traveler volunteered that a ride on a Price stage coach would be ample punishment. A day's run would begin at Sparta, a main stop at Black River Falls, then through Garden Valley, a

stop at Tamarack House east of Levis, Beef River Station, McClellan's (east of Foster), the Parker House at Bracket and a final stop at a ferry crossing the Chippewa River near the Highway 12 bridge. During winter it could be a very cold trip. Heated stones were furnished for passengers but the driver sat atop the coach, guiding four horses and unprotected from the weather. A report reads that one such employee was found frozen to death at the Sparta stop.

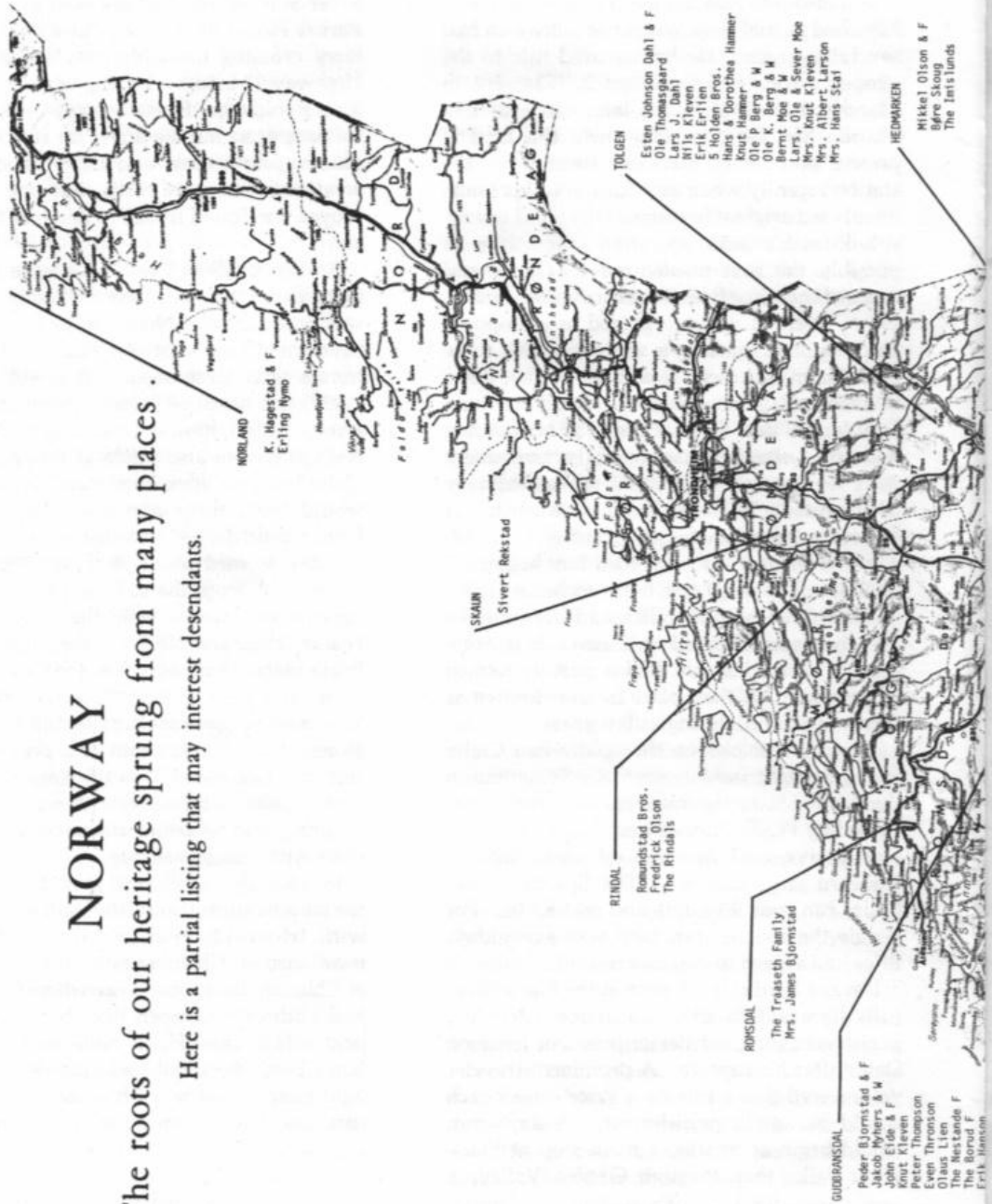
Jim Nix of Clear Creek adds some interesting facts about this stage line. His dad, Andrew, was postmaster at Nix Corners for years. He says the Coon brothers had a barn where horses were exchanged. It is still standing (1975) just north of Foster. Connections with a stage or freight lines from Stevens Point and Neilsville were also made at this point. The Coon brothers were horsemen. At times they would hitch three horses abreast. Heavier loads would demand two teams. Headman for the line seemed to be Bert McClellan. The route came from the east to a spot where the present road forks near the church east of Foster, then travelled northeast past Lester Peat's place. A crossover to the Coon brothers barn came next, then back to the main route. The next stop was Bracket at the Parker House, located just south of a present service station. Nix remembers the house having an orange color, later a green. It was a two story building and overnite stops could be made there with meals available.

In 1878 the legislature granted a franchise for an operation from Whitehall to Eau Claire with tri-weekly mail service. Stops were mentioned at Alhambra post office (section 26), at Chimney Rock post office where C. Wenberg had authority to open mail bags, at Hamlin post office, then Hadleyville post office and Eau Claire. Mrs. Babcock, then 93, recalled a light freight wagon with passenger seats was used and that at times four horses pulled the rig.

NORWAY

The roots of our heritage sprung from many places .

Here is a partial listing that may interest descendants.





FAABERG
Hans, Brian
etc. Johnson
John Lee
Dehlyby Family

LILLEHAMMER
Joh. Ed and Simon Rice & F's
The Bollings

EAST TOTEN
Joh. Frodalen & F
Joh. Christanson & F
Sever Matson & F
Mett & Chris Holte
Even Holte & B
A. Jensen
Joh. Klavestad & F

HURDAL
Even Evenson & M
Martin E. Rognehen & F
Joh. Dahl & F
Neil Garson
John Nelson
Gerrit Hjeltner
Hans Holter & F
Hansbjørn Rognehen

EIDSVOLD
Anders Larson & F

AURSKOG
Peder Rosholm & F

RINGSBAER
Ole Danl
John Klungpeeth

Mrs. Anna Elde
Mrs. Johanna Hjemboe
Rev. O. A. Hjemboe

VALDEIS
Ole Iretien

SOGN
The Hagnes F

AADALEN
Christian Olson Pjoka
Ole Brendeggen

HEDALEN
Anders Johnson
The Flaten Bros.
Gulbrand Torgerson & M
Torvald Rustad

Transplanted "Bygds"

An immigrant family of most any country in northern Europe usually kept contact with relatives or friends in the homeland. When work was obtained or land secured one could be certain such news was part of any correspondence. Most new settlers were impressed by possibilities in this land and were quick to write of advantages over life in the old country. All favorable comment fell on receptive ears of those people who were struggling to keep body and soul together. Immigration rose and early settlers were often times able to find locations for many of their home community people. This often resulted in an actual transplant of whole neighborhoods from the old country to the new and was characteristic of all nationalities.

Norwegian settlement of the eastern half of Trempealeau County began with a trickle in the early 1850's, grew slowly through the Civil War period and mushroomed afterward. All good farm land available under homestead law or railroad purchase was about gone by 1872. The several settlements of these people followed, more or less, the above mentioned trends. For instance, the Blair area was heavily populated by people from Solør, Pigeon Falls and a large number from both sides of Mjosa, Norway's largest inland lake, etc.

Five old country "bygds" (communities) settled in the present Strum area, although there was a scattering from all over the old country. These five settlements began with one early settler from each of these bygds, who through correspondence influenced relatives and friends to come - this place was a good place to locate - and come they did.

From Tolga

Esten Johnson Dahl was the first Norwegian to settle in what is now the Town of Unity. He and his wife had crossed the ocean about 1860, had lived south of Sparta and had four children when they decided to move and obtain their own land. They chose to live in the southeast quarter of section 29 of the future Unity, arriving there on June 18, 1868.

Their home in the old country had been at

Tolga, a cold place whose main industry was a copper smelting plant. When this operation closed in 1870 three men and three single women who had been in contact with the Johnson family sailed and eventually ended their travels in this area. All three men, Ole Thomasgaard, Nels Kleven and Lars Dahl, secured land after a few years close to Johnson's, and the first two mentioned married two of the young ladies who came at the same time. All three men and Esten Johnson were very prominent in early Unity township affairs. All served on school boards for many years and were active in their church.

From the same bygd came the following after a decade or two: Ole P. Berg and wife, Ole K. Berg and wife, Bernt Moe, wife and three sons, Knut Hammer, the Erik Erlie family, Erik Holden and four children besides several others who came here and left at various times. Several women came and were married during later years. These former Tolga men were very active in township affairs, one or more were always connected as chairman, supervisor, clerk or treasurer through many years.

From Hurdal

Hurdal is a small valley about 60 miles north of Oslo. Timber harvesting and a glass works were the sole industry back in the 1800's and when the latter began curbing production, men began rereading news about America and its unbelievably low priced land.

From this place came Even Evenson and his wife during the summer of 1869. He was 25 years of age when he homesteaded in section 30, one mile south of future Strum. He had emigrated in 1866 along with at least one cousin and had spent two years around Sparta. He had learned the English language well enough to qualify as town clerk of Sumner in 1870. Besides operating his farm, Evenson dealt in real estate and seems to have been an intermediary for many Norwegian settlers in this area.

He was of the large Rognlien family and no doubt influenced a half-brother, Martin E. and

his large family to choose homestead land just west in the same section. He had contact with Gustav Gulliksrud and family who settled further up the valley; Christoffer Swendby, the Civil War veteran, and Hans Moltzau drove up from La Crosse County behind Swendby's mules one day, acquired the quarter-section next south. Moltzau was an old Hurdal name, Swendby came from nearby Feiring.

A cousin, Anton Dahl, had homesteaded in section 32 a year after Evenson. H. J. Rognlien was an early arrival. Blacksmith Per Bonkerud and John Nelson Indgjer were influenced by Evenson. Later arrivals from Hurdal were Nels Garson, his brother Olaus, and Oluf Indgjer. Johannes Dahl's large family of grown sons and daughters were all from the small home valley. The sons were merchants in various places. A son, Oluf, was in partnership at Strum for several years. Johannes lived in section 27. Other immigrants came to this community, lived and worked here a short time and found homes elsewhere.

From Rindal

Rindal, a valley near Trondheim, had a group of immigrants who formed a transplanted community in the Big Creek area. Fredrik Olsen found one settler in that part of the long valley when he and Nels Hagestad came there in 1868. The two men had met in Sparta, were looking for land and had heard it was available north of the Beef River in Eau Claire County. Olsen had left Norway in 1861, landed in Quebec and had worked in Lodi in Dane County some years prior to meeting Hagestad. Both men found what they wanted and applied for homestead rights later that year. Both families settled in northern Big Creek the next spring.

Nine people left Rindal in 1869, among this group were three Romunstad brothers and Erik Hanson who had employment on WRR track preparation north of Black River Falls. Letters from the old country informed them of Olsen's location and when an opportunity arose, these men hiked across the unsettled miles and found their acquaintance. All were

impressed and the three brothers obtained their quarter sections of land in one little valley that presently bears their name. Hanson worked as a blacksmith at Eau Claire some years, returned to Norway for a bride, came back and bought land within a mile of the others.

Later arrivals from Rindal that settled in the same area were the Peder Shermoe family, Ole and Lars Stomprud, Lars Hatlee, the Rindal family, besides others who came and moved after a short time.

Hamlin and Osseo were the closest post offices when these arrivals located. These Rindal people erected a small house of worship the very first years. Later several families joined the St. Paul's congregation when it formed. Others became members of the West Beef River synod.

From Solør

Northeast of Oslo, perhaps 75 miles or more, the Glomma River makes a right angle turn westward as it drains the length of a large valley named Osterdal. Inside this angle and northward lies Solør, a fairly large bygd that has two large settlements in this country. Blair has a great number of Solør descendants as well as does Bruce Valley and Chimney Rock of this area. These descendants were often called "solungs".

Karelis Wenberg came to America in 1867, worked a couple of years and then began looking for a place to live. Trempealeau County was reputed to have many Norwegian settlements at that time and he was naturally attracted by this rumor. He claimed land in Chimney Rock and tells that three English speaking settlers preceded him. These men left and Wenberg's countrymen began moving in. In a few years the whole area was settled and the majority were from Solør.

Wenberg's home was a postal station in the Whitehall-Eau Claire stage run. He was authorized to open mail bags. He mentions that knolls had a blue haze where the blueberry crop was ripe, that old Norwegians pronounced Trempealeau "Trommela" and wheat was hauled to a village by that name.

No one at this time can furnish any information as to which of the following families followed Wenberg first. Hiram Johnson, a lifetime resident furnished the names: Olec Skytterud, Johannes Skytterud, Reier Paulson, Ole Paulson, Julius, Jon and Martin Halvorson, Erik Larson, Julius Lee, Thorstein Holstad, Gustav Voldsness, Pauder and Carl Risberg and a Haakenson. Many of these men had families, many others arrived and moved away.

In Bruce Valley we have the Amund Amundson and Ole Halvorson families, locating prior to 1870. With them came the Gunner Gunderson family later settled in Chimney Rock.

From Toten

Only 3% of Norway's rugged land is used for agriculture. One-half way up the west coast of Mjosa, the country's largest inland lake, the rough, rocky timberland levels out to the rolling acres of Toten appearing in the west. Three or four small villages serve the needs of several hundred people, most of them employed as a result of the high productivity of the many fine gaards. One can speculate

The Viking Ski Club

Probably no activity brought more healthy publicity to Strum than its skiers and their sponsors, the Viking Ski Club. The year was 1931 and winter snows lay deep when Bjorn Skoyen, a recent arrival from Norway, received his heavy 8-foot jumping skis from home and began sliding down what was then known as the Eide hill. Local authorities of this sport acknowledged his good form and the long leaps attracted much attention.

About the same time Torval Rustad, another recent arrival from that country, was working at the Jacob Myhers farm about four miles east of town. The men were cutting wood and he at once recognized a certain steep hillside as having a good contour for a ski jumping site. Stumps were sheared off close to ground level. During winter snow was packed into place and before spring a jumping competition took place, the first of many such events through future years.

just why would people leave a place like this? But a one time over-population, gaard owners who kept the husman a husman, and young men who yearned for land with no hope of obtaining it here.

From this garden spot in the old country came early settlers Johannes Christianson in 1857, Hans Paulson, Johannes Frodal, all with wives and families. Following these came the Holtes, Chris and Matt, brothers,, and Even and Martinus, brothers. The latter was killed in a timber accident. About 1880 or just later, Sever Matson and Hans Frodal arrived.

Just about 1900, Harold and John Johnson of the Klavestad family came. Later Johannes Klavestad, his wife and four grown sons and daughters arrived. Mads Hanestad, wife and a daughter, and Martin Bjorklund, wife and son and all of the same family followed.

There may have been several others in early days that tarried awhile and left. Marcus and Paul Gjestvang came here during the mid-twenties and returned. Bjorn Skoyen the ski-jumper did likewise. His brother Ralph Skoyen lived here awhile and then moved to other parts of the state at various times.

Experienced jumpers from Eau Claire were invited, Skoyen took part and for the first time most locals became aware that several brothers of the Nelson family from Hale were ski jumpers of no ordinary ability. Older Eau Claire athletes competed in class A. Skoyen and the Nelsons, three of them, were entered in B class and outdistanced the older skiers in the long standing event. Auctioneer Ing Mhyers was announcer for the afternoon. The meet was run off without a hitch and enthusiasm was high.

There was no move the next winter, the first of the depression months, except that Ingvald Myhers erected a 20-foot scaffold and ran a contest to pay for its construction. It was during the latter part of the following winter that a meeting was held at the Myhers farm where a decision was made to organize a club. Ing Myhers was elected president and William Kromroy secretary. Rolf Skoyen suggested



The Viking Ski Club. This picture was taken February 18, 1935. In the front row is Johanne Kolstad of Norway, the reigning women's world champion. Front row (L-R): Ellsmore Call (?), Rolf Skoyen, Companion & Johanne Kolstad, Ernest Severson, Snowball Severude, Jerry Olson, Ted Peterson, Alton Holte. Middle row: Raymond Melson, Olger Michelson, Tom Nelson, Reuben Nelson, Millard Eide, Mel Johnson, Ted Gilbertson, Erling Nymo. Back row: Martin Myhers, Richard Hanson, Bud Rice, Guilford Hanson, Laurence Nelson, Ovid Berg, Harry Eide, Roy Matson, Ing Myhers, Walter Stensby, Walter Nelson, Leonard Eide, E. Michelson.

the name "Viking Ski Club", pronouncing the name correctly: "Veeking". Plans were suggested to have the hill surveyed in order to provide a steeper landing hill and a scaffold to suit the underhill. Preliminary work was completed early the next summer. Ski manufacturer Martin Strand provided prints of the proposed hill and work began during late summer.

The depression was at its height, funds were non-existent, but enough time was spared from farm jobs to begin excavating the landing hill. A pile driver hoist was obtained, powered by a Model T Ford and before frost set in the lower part of the hill had been dug out 4-5 feet and put in shape for winter snows. Poles were cut for a scaffold that towered 45 feet above the highest point on the knoll. It was completed after winter had set in. Only one man, Alvin Nelson, was paid during this work. He was foreman of any crew that appeared and

often worked alone. But the job was done, snow was applied and brother Rueben, best of the skiing family at that time, took the initial ride down the hill.



The Nelson brothers (1935), Raymond, Walter, Reuben, Tom, Victor & Joe.

The Age of the Grain Elevator

There have been several statements in this story about the early pioneers, their need of cash and that wheat provided this need. Plus it could be ground into flour for baking bread.

The matter of breaking the new ground for planting, the first harvests requiring considerable hand labor, the equally slow threshing and finally a trip to a far off market place was a risky venture. Trempealeau, pronounced "Tromelo" by early norwegians, was the earliest market place. Karelis Wenberg, the first permanent settler in Chimney Rock township, has written that a trip to deliver wheat required three days with oxen. Neighbors timed their homeward trips simultaneously to avoid robberies which were frequent. When the WRR reached Augusta in 1869, that place became a shipping point for upper Beef River settlers. Eau Claire became a terminal the next year.

During the 1880's wheat prices dropped drastically, but by that time acreage of tillable land had increased, the meager farm equipment had become more efficient and oats had replaced wheat somewhat as a cash crop. All

big city drayage was horse drawn at that time and the number of these animals required large amounts of hay, straw and grain continually. Advent of Foster's spur down this valley in 1890 provided access to ready markets for about all the farmers could produce. A 1903 norwegian newspaper quotes wheat at 69 cents per bushel, oats at 36 cents.

It was expected that an elevator to facilitate grain loading would grace the local spur at an early date. Northern Grain & Seed was the first, with John Clemenson as manager. The large Cargill Company built shortly afterward and installed big Ole Thomasgaard as buyer. Neither company can furnish the date of their first operation here and as property on railroad land was not assessable, one can only guess that the first carloads were loaded out during the very early 1890's.

Business was good. Hay, straw and grain moved to Chicago markets that first year from two dealers in each of Eleva, Strum and Osseo. Young T. M. Olson had been dabbling in farm implements for a short time and soon was



The elevators, taken before 1912. Left to right, T. M. Olson's, Fred Lyon's, Northern Grain & Seed, Cargill. Of those pictured, only the Strum Mills building at far right still stands.

buying farm produce in a building next to the main street railroad crossing. By 1904 Fred Lyon had erected an elevator just east of Olson's building and Strum had four dealers in the grain buying business.

This phase of local agriculture had about two decades of boom. Except for two or three years, farm prices were considered good from the mid 1890's to the early 1920's. Whatever the farmer brought to town seemed to have a ready market. Taxes were moderate, the urge to buy high priced automobiles with an accompanying demand for better roads had yet to snowball. About the only cloud on the economic horizon seemed to be high farm prices as a result of World War I.

As stated several times throughout this story, roads were horrible. With four buyers scouring the valleys as far as 10-12 miles out, business was secured but, except for nearby customers, the majority waited for snow and use of a sleigh to haul their goods to town. Main street became alive with the first snowfall. An early morning start from 10 miles out would bring a farmer into town at about 10:00 A.M. to become part of two or three dozen teams with sleighs trying to unload. There were varied experiences. Henry Hammer, an upper Johnson Valley farmer, was remembered to have hired three neighbors to haul baled hay to the cars. It was cold, far below zero those three days, but the four made two trips each day from four miles out, loading and unloading enough baled hay to fill several carloads. Hay bales in those days were wire tied and weighed around 110-120 lbs. A sleigh and a good team could handle a two ton load with normal winter road conditions. Each railroad car would hold 400 bales or more depending on its size. Hay usually brought \$6.00 per ton and up. Ted Eide remembered that as a bouncing youth, he had a winter of consider-

able hauling from their farm in Bruce Valley. A start at 11:00 A.M. would find he and his load edging up to the present Indrebo hill just south of town. With Chimney Rock and Bruce Valley sleigh loads from the south and Johnson Valley and Unity coming from the east, it was a rare day that drivers did not blanket their horses and inch their way the last half mile to town. Loads from the Big Creek area usually double-teamed up the north side of that ridge before road building equipment changed the approach to make easier access. Residents of that valley contributed much local activity through the years. One of their men, John Clemenson, operated the Northern Grain & Seed for several years.

As most all others, the day of the elevator passed. Oats brought 52 cents per bushel in 1910, about the same in 1915 and up to 55 cents in 1920. Wheat reached a little over \$2.50 per bushel shortly after 1920, but the market slumped from then on, possibly because western wheat was a better flour grain. Small trucks began freight service in big cities and the day of the horse was ending for such work. With their exit, purchases of hay, straw and grain dropped and local farmers began milking a greater number of cows, all of which slowed activity at the elevator. T. M. Olson obtained title to the Northern Grain & Seed building. The Cargil Company disposed of their investment at an earlier date. A Farmer Co-op ran the Lyon facility for some after his death. Another co-op altered and operated the Northern building as a feed mill for some time.

All these buildings are gone now. In their time they served this trade area very well and played a great part in development of the village. The only building left of the pictured skyline is the white structure built by Henry Ruseling.

Builders and Buildings

Builders and carpenters have always been plentiful in this community, some being exceptional craftsmen. To enumerate all at this late date would be about impossible but at the risk of missing some able men we will mention

names as one and all in building our town.

Undoubtedly the St. Paul's church was the first building within the present corporate limits of the village. It seems that Erik Holden was the head carpenter but several men worked



A 1911 scene looking south. Every building past Adolph Rye's meat market on the left burned in the December 25, 1914 fire. By then, the black-roofed building had been replaced by T. M. Olson's large brick structure which probably saved the rest of the block. Note H. H. Strand's furniture & casket business in what later became the post office. The little brick telephone building had yet to be built.

and the able Sivert Rekstad was active from beginning to completion. In an old church record book he relates about the problems of that project and how the crew was fed by ladies of the parish.

Ole Kittleson and Tore Holden had the first store buildings. Holden's was a very small building located just north of the Rod & Gun Club park entrance. No doubt brother Erik had a hand in construction. Kittleson's building is standing yet at 313 Woodland Drive. Part of the present Junior Skovbraaten home on 5th Avenue has been generally credited with being the first home in Strum, but the Colpit's home at 205 Elm Street was not far behind.

An attempt is hereby made to identify buildings of the business district with first owners and builders that some sort of record will exist for anyone who may become interested at a later date. Beginning at the present church lot; several buildings occupied this ground. Two burned and Henry Ruseling moved the present Farm Service building from this lot to its present location. Schneider Construction of Independence built the church in 1915-1916. They also had the contract for the two-story school building north of town at the same time. Both are still in good condition.

Adolph Rye built the present locker plant as a meat market, later owned by Anton Peterson who carried on the same business. Albert Skoug added the locker facilities about 1947.

Will Rice and Carl Semingson worked on the T. M. Olson brick building in 1914. Olaf Martinson and crew erected the building that housed the Lars Olson Cafe for years. It was originally erected as a drug store for O. A. Rognlien in 1920.

The present "clinic" had its beginnings as the Liberty Hotel about the same time. Ed Thomasgaard was the first owner, although there have been several operators through the years.

Shortly after the disastrous 1914 fire, John Call built the red brick building now serving as a cafe. For years it was headquarters for the Strum Farmers Store with implement service in buildings toward the south.

H. George Peterson erected the present laundromat as an implement garage in 1948. The Farmers Union building went up the same year. The Cenex storage building was erected by Jim Maloney and began as a service station in 1923. Carl Lee purchased it later and operated Whippet, Chevrolet and Plymouth agencies from there.



Two scenes looking north taken about 10 years apart. The first was taken in 1911, the second about 1922. Note that in the second picture the Ford garage has been built, the east side of Main Street has been rebuilt, and the West Beef River Church steeple dominates the skyline.

The last of the early buildings on the east side of Main Street is one of the oldest business buildings and was used for years for oil storage. It was still standing in 1979. Sivert Rekstad built it to house millwork and builders' hardware when he worked for the lumber yards.

Going north on the west side, the AMPI service station had its beginnings at the hands of Basil Johnson. Glen Haukeness succeeded him and made several additions. Bernie Campbell owns the old MWA hall, built by John Olson around 1901. The Strum Manufacturing Co. building was erected by Jewel Berge in the early '50's. A previous blacksmith shop occupied ground just north of the present site. Harry's Shoe Shop opened for business in 1963. Ole Nysven's little Post Office stood a few feet north. The lumber yard had its beginnings with far less shed room than now. Only a small office building provided shelter for workers. The lumber lay in the open.

H. George Peterson built the Ford garage, now Preston Press, in 1915. The frame building next door is on 1907 pictures and served at first

as a sort of hardware store. It has served as a cafe and tavern and now houses an antique shop.

Hans Jacobson owns the corner block and erected the block store himself after the 1955 fire which destroyed the original frame structure on that site. Ted Hulberg lost the former Mathison store in the same fire and erected his grocery afterwards. The bank and drug store were built by John J. Dahl in 1905. The original Robbe's store was erected at different times. Willumson put up the north part first, shortly after the railroad came into Strum.

The first telephone office had space on the present church lot. The building burned and the little brick structure went up about 1912. H. H. Strand erected both the next buildings. Pictures show the present Olson's Hardware building serving as a restaurant. John Klungseth operated the next building, now dismantled. He built furniture and made caskets. The Phillips service station was erected in the early twenties and has been rebuilt several times.



Two scenes of Elm Street, the older one looking east and the more recent looking west. The large house on the left of the earlier picture is the Colpits house at 205 Elm St.

Strange Sights and Main Street

Through the years there have been many strange sights on Main Street. It is short, a mere two blocks in length, so anything unusual is always noticed. But the following happenings, some quite routine, some otherwise, are worthy of mention.

Life on Main Street, now 5th Avenue, began when N. C. Foster's crew delighted area farmers by building up the grade and laying rail down the prairie in late 1889. No pictures of this operation can be located. It is generally remembered that Paul Moltzau headed a crew that provided fill for railroad bridge approaches and that men used wheelbarrows during the final few feet.



A view from the south. The telephone pole meant this picture was taken sometime after 1907. The absence of the West Beef River Steeple means it was taken before 1915.

There was no business operating on the south side of the river at that time but someone influenced Foster to provide a side track which was soon put to use. During the next year there was activity and wagon tracks leading to Carter's Crossing began to shape a main street. In a few short years there were many buildings, all frame lumber, all housing an activity necessary for serving an agricultural community.

N. C. Foster was a Fairchild lumber baron and when his freight train began depositing his products it was welcomed by the growing town. The small office and piles of lumber lay on the west side of Main Street, south of the track. A second requirement of an agricultural community, a stockyard, lay next west of Foster's yard. Ole Nysven, long time postmaster, built his small office about thirty feet

south of Foster's property. Access to the active yard area was a narrow alley between these two owners, an entrance that was very limited and caused considerable difficulty at times. The stock yards and their loading facilities were very necessary to farmers and buyers alike during the pre-motorized period of produce marketing.

Marketing of livestock was made possible by Foster's newly laid rails and every farmer in the area really appreciated this service. Heretofore, raising of cattle was limited by travel to locate a buyer. Sever Olson, John Call, Adolph Rye, Ole Romundstad and several shipping associations were early buyers. They scoured the countryside, buying and lining up cattle for shipment, usually to a Chicago market.

Farmers in a certain area would be alerted as to the day stock would be received. A drive would begin in the early morning hours, 10-12 miles out, and as the herd traveled toward town, sellers would add their number until 40 or 50 or 60 head of cattle would be turned into the alley at Nysven's post office corner. Drives from the north came across the river bridge and up Main Street. Pedestrians had ample warning.

Shipments were large. Olson had 21 cars loaded one day. Other buyers had equally busy days. The drovers usually were treated to a dinner at the hotel after a strenuous half day's work. According to Eau Claire Leader records, hogs brought \$4.65 to 4.80 in February, 1900, cattle \$4.25 to 5.25. In September, 1920 that market was paying \$14.40 and up per hundred wt. for hogs, \$8.50 to \$18.00 for cattle. Butter was 54 cents per pound, oats 55 cents per bushel and wheat \$2.25 per bushel. In July, 1927, their market paid 45 cents for oats, \$1.30 per bushel for wheat. Butter was 36 cents, hogs - \$9.50 per hundred wt. and cattle was \$10.00 and up. In 1909 hogs were \$7.65, wheat \$1.10, oats 52 cents, cattle \$7.00 to \$9.00 and butter 25 cents.

A different sort of drive took place down



Independence Day, 1911.

*Note the Central House
hotel which burned in 1914.*

Main Street a dozen years ago. A herd of a hundred beef cattle were moved from a pasture area some half dozen miles south of town to a feed lot about ten miles north of Strum. The path of travel was County Trunk D through town and across the river bridge. News viewers on the NBC network around the United States saw a steaming herd of beef make their way down Main Street one cold winter afternoon. Harold Halverson, a local boy, handled the camera and former Strum residents were happy to see the old town had changed little.

While discussing cattle on Main Street, how many now living remember the time Even Holte's prize holstein 1½ ton bull made his way to market. He was being led behind a wagon on the first leg of a Chicago journey and must have had a premonition of coming events. The old boy lay down on the main street railway crossing and all attempts to move him was futile until a small boy built a fire under his tail end!

And who can forget Long Jim Maloney's annual visits. He lived 10 miles south in Bruce Valley and raised thousands of sheep. The trek to market was most unusual. Jim practically lived with his sheep; they knew him and when he rang a small bell or pounded his tin pail they followed - up the Bruce Valley road, filling the right-of-way from fence to fence. A team and wagon followed to pick up stragglers. An early morning start usually had him

ascending the Bruce Valley hill by noon. A short rest at the top and the route was down the bluff road to market (County Trunk D to Johnson Valley had yet to be laid). Jim rang the bell or pounded his tin pail, the woolies followed, always several carloads of them, filling the street for a whole block, all to be turned at Nysven's corner. A sight long remembered, but never recorded by camera.

And of course, no one who viewed or helped Paul Moltzau deliver his annual hog crop can forget that uncommon scene. Paul farmed just north of town a mile or so and usually had 40-50 porkers ready for fall delivery. Most hog raisers hauled their shipments. Paul was a drover. He felt that hogs were intelligent animals and would walk the highway, such as it was in pre-auto days, with little guiding until they reached Main Street when three or four of his boys would recruit every willing urchin available for the last two blocks to Nysven's hazard. Paul always followed in his buggy. An economical and practical trip to market, impossible without Paul's ingenuity and Foster's promotion.

However, activities on Main Street were not always confined to cattle movement although such events could create some odd situations. Entertainment was frequent. Back in pre-auto days at least one small circus plodded into town each year. Most all had an elephant of questionable age and health, a toothless lion snoozing the afternoon away in an iron bound

cage and always a number of dogs would perform tricks that Sport or Shep just could not learn. Also, here were medicine shows with their variety of soothing salve and a few instrumental numbers. Carnivals were frequent. One over-wintered in Strum and a large snake, boxed for the season, spent a comfortable winter in a basement of an unknowing owner. Chataquas were good entertainment and a business group dated these programs year after year.

Independence day celebrations took place in 1907, 1911 and 1920. The 1911 event shows Main Street decked with pine branches for shade and among everything else, an automobile seems the center of attraction. All concessions were on Main Street which also was the site of all parades.

Probably the most spectacular of numerous free acts through the years took place during a Labor Day celebration in 1934. The writer was secretary of the Commercial Club at the time and charged with obtaining a good free attraction for the event. Because of depression times the purse was necessarily small, but finally an ad in a Twin City daily brought results.

The reply came from a former Hollywood stuntman, unemployed of course, who would dive from a 90-foot ladder into a small tank filled with five feet of water. It was a fire dive, timed for late evening. He would furnish the ladder and tank, the club was obligated to fill the tank with water, furnish 5 gallons of gasoline and \$75 for two performances.

The stuntman arrived a day early. The ladder went up and was possibly a few feet short of the figure advertised, but it towered far over the highest buildings. The tank seemed woefully small. The site of action was the lot where the Post Office now stands.

Came the evening and the show. The climb began at 9 PM. Preliminary to that the diver soaked the upper part of a white coverall with gasoline. A responsible party had been appointed to fire the tank on signal. Most of the 5 gallon can had been poured on the water. After considerable hullabaloo, Captain Delps (title assumed he said) reached the small plat-

form high above a crowd that covered every bit of available ground space below.

Plans called for the captain to fire himself, whereupon the tank would be torched and the dive to follow immediately. Things went differently - a high wind set the diver afire. Whether the same zephyr blew out the torch far below, no one would guess, but after two, three desperate yells for a light, the captain dove and fortunately hit the tank squarely, sending about two barrels of water over the responsible citizen who was still trying to start a fire.

It was a short, spectacular act. As one spectator remarked, "If you blinked, you missed it." The club paid \$37.50 for the evening's performance. Today . . . ?

Probably the most bizarre of Main Street events concerned a bachelor who lived a couple of miles south of town and a group of local vigilantes who used the law in a manner that satisfied all at small cost. Sever Moe was normally a quiet unobtrusive person who became an abnormal pest when had "too many". He had need of supplies sometime during the cold winter months and had tarried far beyond reasonable time. Business men bore his conduct for a couple of days but when he spilled a bowl of soup on a waitress at the Ole Myhers cafe, patience ran out, enough was enough.

Local law enforcement was vested in a town constable. Genial Del Williams was justice of the peace and interpreted enough of the statutes necessary to keep things reasonably quiet. It was the dead of winter; no auto roads those days, no uniformed officer ready to answer a call in a warm, brightly identified car. Time was the early twenties and a small town was an isolated spot, far from prompt authority.

The culprit was in sort of a stupor and those present felt a good scare would suffice. Judge Williams was always ready for some such scheme. Moe was informed there would be a trial and a prosecutor was appointed, a defense attorney selected and the most nondescript jury that ever sat was seated.

A salesman overnighing at the Liberty Hotel was prosecutor and opened the "trial" by painting the soup spilling as a most heinous



A filled Main Street as a Steam Engine Days Parade ends.

crime. The defense was weak, the jury withdrew, deliberated about two minutes, then came back with a "guilty" verdict. Judge Williams, after some choice words, fixed hanging as the penalty - to be carried out promptly.

Outside went the whole crew, a rope was produced, thrown over a convenient telephone pole arm, the culprit encircled by it and everything was ready. The judge declared a moments silence was proper prior to such a dastardly act after which he granted a few last words. Moe was heard to mumble something about "going home". The rope was removed and the vigilantes watched with delight as his white soled overshoes disappeared southward into the night.

An event enjoyed immensely by big city ski jumpers here for a ski tournament was the 9 o'clock curfew affecting the village small fry. All children under 12 were off limits on Main Street after that hour, unless accompanied by parents. Every small boy, and most girls knew the big name skiers of that day and were not

about to miss spending every minute possible soaking up ski talk. Chicago members especially were greatly amused when Constable Bernt Svendson herded about thirty youngsters down to the church corner at 9. The ordinance seemed to effect Main Street only. The biggest crowds to populate Main Street took place on Steam Engine Day grand parades. Estimates from many sources varied greatly but, with certainty, over 20,000 people visited Strum. Main Street was filled with spectators.

It is said only a fire changes main street of a small town. Well, we have had fires and while the business district had not kept pace with the residential area, there has been change, more change than one can recall on a spur of a moment.

Change? It is only a hundred and two years ago, this spring, since Even Evenson headed across the river to lay out a right-of-way that might aid him in erecting the first building that graced Main Street for 80 years.