LIFE IN THE PAST LANE

SPRING 2023

Museum News

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VOLUME 50 ISSUE 1

The Gun has at last found a home.! Bruce Aiton's Uncle Harold Aiton brought this gun to America after WW2. Harold's son John donated it to the Itasca County historical Society in 2020. Bruce had been visiting with him up in Northome and he reluctantly donated it to the Historical Society. Bruce brought it back and we stored it in the big safe. As everyone knows Bruce passed away before it was put in the collection. Since that time, the ICHS board set up a policy of not accepting weapons into the collections.
I was cleaning out the safe the other day and came across the gun again. I brought it before the volunteer collections committee and according to the new policy it was put in the "No" department. That opened up the opportunity to find a home for this unique gun. We had a gun collector let us know what the value would be. Friday I had unexpected visitors Jeff and Laurel Aiton up for the Easter Celebration. Jeff is so excited that the gun will remain in the family. John Aiton is in a nursing home and Jeff said this would make John very happy to know it is still in the family.

Newest Addition to the Itasca Veterans Project.

This body armor was worn by retired Sergeant First Class (SFC) Preston Osborne of Deer River , MN while conducting daily patrols in Kandahar City, Afghanistan from April 2011 to April 2012. SFC Osborne conducted Joint patrols with the Afghan police of district 8 on the western edge of Kandahar to detour weapons and explosives smuggling into the city. This equipment protected him when he came in direct contact with an anti personal mine.

Another version of our 53th Year Logo. Just a couple more changes and then the playing cards will be printed.

Along Memory Trails
A History of DEER RIVER
Prepared and Written by Mrs. Gladys Erola
Published by the Western Itasca Review

About the Author

Mrs. Gladys Erola is a fifth grade teacher in the Deer River school system.

She was born in Pipestone, Minn., the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Forsman. The family moved to Deer River in 1924. Mrs. Erola attended schools in Deer River and is a graduate of St. Cloud Teachers college.

After graduation from St. Cloud, Mrs. Erola returned to Deer River to pursue her profession, and has remained here since 1933 when she obtained her first teaching position.

She and her husband, Omar, have two sons, Roger and Raymond, both now students in the Deer River high school.

Furthering her studies as a history major, Mrs. Erola prepared the article as a part of her special course in Minnesota history.

The article ran as a weekly feature in the Western Itasca Review for 13 weeks. She consented to have it prepared into booklet form, since there was no other composite history of Deer River as a village itself on record.

Because of the interest in this article which appeared in the Deer River newspaper, it was agreed that her article be published by the Western Itasca Review for sale in booklet form to the general public.

Her history of Deer River and neighboring communities follows :

I was thoroughly fascinated by the facts I was able to dig up when I decided to try to write a general history of the village of Deer River.

If one were to find his way to "Itasca City" as Deer River was called in its infancy, one would have seen a small trading post belonging to Frank Vance. A little later one would have seen a group of buildings on the north side of a street across from the trading post. These buildings ex-tended from where the Co-op store is today, west to the Great Northern water tank. Included were Tuller and Ter-penning General Store, A. D. Brooks Store, Churchill's Hotel, Eli Loisel's Barber Shop, Hotel Quigg, the depot and a group of saloons. The first depot was nothing but a box car which had been set beside the tracks and fixed up as an office. A few log cabins, homes of these people, were scat-tered here and there in the area of the railroad water tank.

The village was not incorporated as such until November 23, 1891 when J. P. Simms had the present site platted.

The settlement was gouged out of the timber land which first brought the lumbermen into the area. The forest came right up to the buildings. When the biggest share of the town burned in 1897, Charlie Voigt blew the stumps to clear land so that the rebuilding could be done on the present site.

The Duluth and Winnipeg Railroad came as far as Deer River and formed a junction at the crossing of the Minneapolis and Rainy River Railroad. The M and R as it was called, was begun in 1894 by J. P. Simons and David Joyce. It extended as far as Deer Lake at first and then on to Little Bowstring. The track was laid on corduroy. It had a wood burner engine which used four foot wood. The switch engine only had four wheels and Russell cars were used for the logs. Logs were taken out of Turtle Lake and Little Bowstring and dumped into White Oak lake by means of a large trestle which was built over the water.

The Akeley Lumber Co. camps cut the timber in the winter and floated logs down the rivers in the spring as soon as the ice went out. These were called "drives" and the men who tended these drives were the "River Rats", the aristocrats of the lumber Camps. It took 125 men alone to man the drives. Deer River was narrow and there had to be men on every bend so that the logs wouldn't jam. Before the sawmill was burnt, the logs were floated all the way to Minneapolis via White Oak Lake and the Mississippi.

About 1896 the Akeley Lumber Co. which carried on the first *logging* operations, sold out to the Itasca Lumber Co. The Itasca Co. then built a saw mill on White Oak Lake and at intervals, extended different spurs on their railroad to Spring Lake, Wirt, Dora Lake, Round Lake, Bigfork, Effie and Craig. An item copied from "The Itasca News" of 1898 had this to say;

"Quite a village is that which has sprung up on the line of the Itasca Lumber Co.'s logging road midway from Deer River to White Oak Lake — This lake is where the logs are dumped from the trains and the houses here located are to be used as headquarters for the landing section and train crews. A frame engine house with two stalls is being constructed, a well driven and several acres of dense forest cleared away a lively suburb of Deer River.

Story continues on Page 5

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

October 2022—March 2023

SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP

$1,600 Richard Lacher
$500 Bowens Lodge

PATRON $250 +

David Bishop
Dede Emerson

PRESERVATION $100

Patricia Feld
Merton Rima
Tim Torgerson
Juan Lazo
Meredith Bleifuss
Frank King
Wanda Clark
Kay Aiton
Terry Hammann
Patricia Grimes

SUPPORTING $65

Kenn Fifeldy
Scott & Randi Carter
Donald & Phyllis Gornowich
Marvin Ott
Ted & Barbara James
Saundra Helgeson
Roberta & Mike Truempler
Richard & Beverly Johnson
Mary Schmitz

FAMILY $40

Duane Benson
Tim & Joan Bonner
Casey & Georgette Renslow
Susan Hayes
Bender's Shoes & Sport
Paul & Joan Lussenhop
Julian Bly Hoshal
Richard & Sharon King
William & Karla Block
Margaret Cone
Duane & Anna Eells
Bill & Pat Davis
Duane & Ginny Frahm
Raymond & Linda Embertson
Senja Morque

INDIVIDUAL $25

Heath Burthwick
David Delawyer
Carol Steele
Sandy Cameron
Katherine Ertl
Darwin Dalen
Kim Brown
Barbara Warrington
Allen Co Public Library
William A. Best
Robert Best
Leo Trunt
Carolyn Hanka
JoAnn Bakken
Ruth Dickie (Jellison)
Phyllis Magelky
Kay Mueller
Flora Conklin
Norma Eppinga

Carol Steel is the new Membership Volunteer. She is doing a wonderful job going back to pick-up the members that hadn't renewed in 2021-2022.

MEMORIALS

JoAnn Frick
Charlene Johnson

You can help us save on postage by getting your newsletter emailed to you. Please send your email address to ichs@paulbunyan.net

Reserve your hour at the Escape Room!
218-326-6431
Coming this summer: "Bigfoot's Backyard!"

As you do your tax and estate planning, please keep us in mind. ICHS is a 501(c)(3) and as such can accept charitable donations. An RMD from your retirement account can be made directly to us.

Members:

I think that spring is finally here! We are doing a lot of spring cleaning here at the historical society. One of our biggest dilemmas is inventory and the space that is needed to store our collection. In years past a lot of the collection was just put in the collection without a connection, providence, or story to tell. Scott our Monday volunteer has taken on a huge project of going through the drug store. It involves 60 boxes of items. He is really enjoying learning about all the old drugs and what they were used for. We will again have another story to tell….

Volunteers have been very busy trying to catch up with the photos and accessing that we had gotten so far behind in during the covid years. James and Marcus through the SCSEP program are currently putting in 20 hours weekly. James is indexing a large book of Itasca County Veterans Book #3 and Marcus is putting together a book of Itasca County officials from 1891 to 1980. We are all helping to locate as many pictures of the officials to put in the book.

We were fortunate to receive 8 boxes of materials from the Grand Rapids High School library. They were cleaning out storage and we are excited to report a lot of extra yearbooks are now available! After we keep 2 per year and give a set to Minnesota Discovery Center and those remaining are considered extra. The volunteers are digitizing the School Scripts and archiving over 10 years for easier access to the classes. Also in the collection were a lot of class reunion booklets. Pictures galore which some are not identified and we will be putting them out during the fair for people to help us identify. **Lilah**

BOARD NEWS

Approved forming a committee to put on the Purse Bingo in September.
2nd Annual Paddle & Pint will take place on July 1st. It will be an 8 mile paddle ending in Blackberry.
New furnace is coming soon. After a big water leak we now have a new water heater and looking at options for the water fountain.
Sue shared the news about 3800 vets registered on the site with 2900 edited and published. She also told the story about the door that the Vietnam soldiers went through at the Redding Café. We helped to pull all the information on the 8 men KIA during the Vietnam war. Open house for the Project at VFW will be later on this summer. Hopefully some of you can go and enjoy the stories from the men's families.

2023 COUNTIES : Itasca County

2022 CITIES: Grand Rapids
LaPrairie Nashwauk Bigfork Calumet Keewatin Taconite

2023 SUPPORTING TOWNSHIPS as of April 10th: Lone Pine Wirt Carpenter Wabana Kinghurst Arbo Bowstring

Continued from page 2

The Itasca Lumber Co. logged for Pillsbury, Weyerhaeuser, Bovey, Delaittre and the C. H. Smith Co. They maintained about seventeen lumber camps hiring a total of about 3,000 men and floated one hundred million feet of pine logs to Minneapolis per year. The Itasca Mill, in its prime, cut one hundred thousand feet a day.

The men were sent to the camps through employment agencies in Duluth and Minneapolis. Most of them were French-Canadians and Scandinavians. The company paid their fare and it was taken out of their wages before they were paid off in the spring. The lumberjacks signed up to stay the whole winter and came by train to Deer River under the watchful eyes of a chaperone who saw that they reached their proper destination.

'Pile camps were well run and food was plentiful and most of the time, good. The men lived in bunk houses and had mattresses made of straw. There was a Wanigan where one could buy items such as tobacco, cheap candy, peanuts in the shell, gloves, socks and mitts. There were also canned tomatoes which they seemed to crave. The men would buy, open and drink the tomatoes from the can as a snack between meals or at bedtime. No whiskey was allowed in camp.

Besides the cook, bull-cook and foreman, were the sawyers, top loaders, swampers, teamsters, road monkeys, barn bosses, night watchmen and handymen.

The men did their own washings and it was a common sight to see the steaming socks and underwear hanging around the stoves in the bunkhouse.

If anyone had a musical instrument it was usually played in the evening. Cards were a favorite pastime but much time was also spent in filing saws, sharpening axes and re-airing tools needed in their work.

Once in a while it was necessary to eat out of doors. The cooking was done in a Wanigan and a table was set outside. "Many is the time I've seen beans freeze on the fork," said Voigt. "I was bull cook in one camp for three months and four days. I worked eighteen hours a day and got 50.00 dollars per month. That was the first time I was ever able to buy myself a suit of clothes. I was fifteen then."

The camp foreman would rouse the men in the morning by shouting, "Daylight in the swamp !" Of course it was still pitch dark for two hours or more after that but by the time breakfast was over and they were at the job site day was beginning to dawn.

Food for the camps was shipped to Deer River in car load lots and then distributed by the M & R to the various camp landings. "I remember especially," said Wallace, "the car loads of navy beans, cheese, sugar, flour, tea, beef and peanuts in the shell."

In warmer weather, ham, salt pork and bacon were consumed in huge quantities. Liver, being a by-product, was plentiful. In fact, so much was shipped on the M & R, along with quantities of sausages and bolognas that the nickname "Gut and Liver" was very commonly used by everyone referring to the M & R Railroad. Today the name still sticks even though the tracks have long since been removed. (In 1931)

Most of the men were employed in the fall and most of work was done in the winter after the bogs, marshes, low-lands and rivers had frozen up. Ice roads were made for convenience in hauling 'heavy loads. The road bed was first cleared and then flattened by rollers and groovers pulled by several teams. Water was siphoned from the lakes into water tanks and the road. To be continued.....

Volunteers First Quarter Hours.

In January we had 13 volunteers put in 378.25 hours

In February we had 11 volunteers for a total of 227.5 hours

And March we had only 10 volunteers put in 309.5 hours.

2023
ICHS Board of Directors

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Itasca County Historical Society
201 North Pokegama Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
www.itascahistorical.org

September 30 at the
Timberlake Lodge
Tickets $50

Woodland Bank is the top Event Sponsor of the Louis Vuitton Purse and Paul Bunyan is Media Sponsor with the Marc Jacobs Purse. There will be 5 Coach, 10 Kate Spade, 10 Michael Kors Sponsorships.
A team of 9 people are now working hard to bring about this great event. Tickets will be available in May.