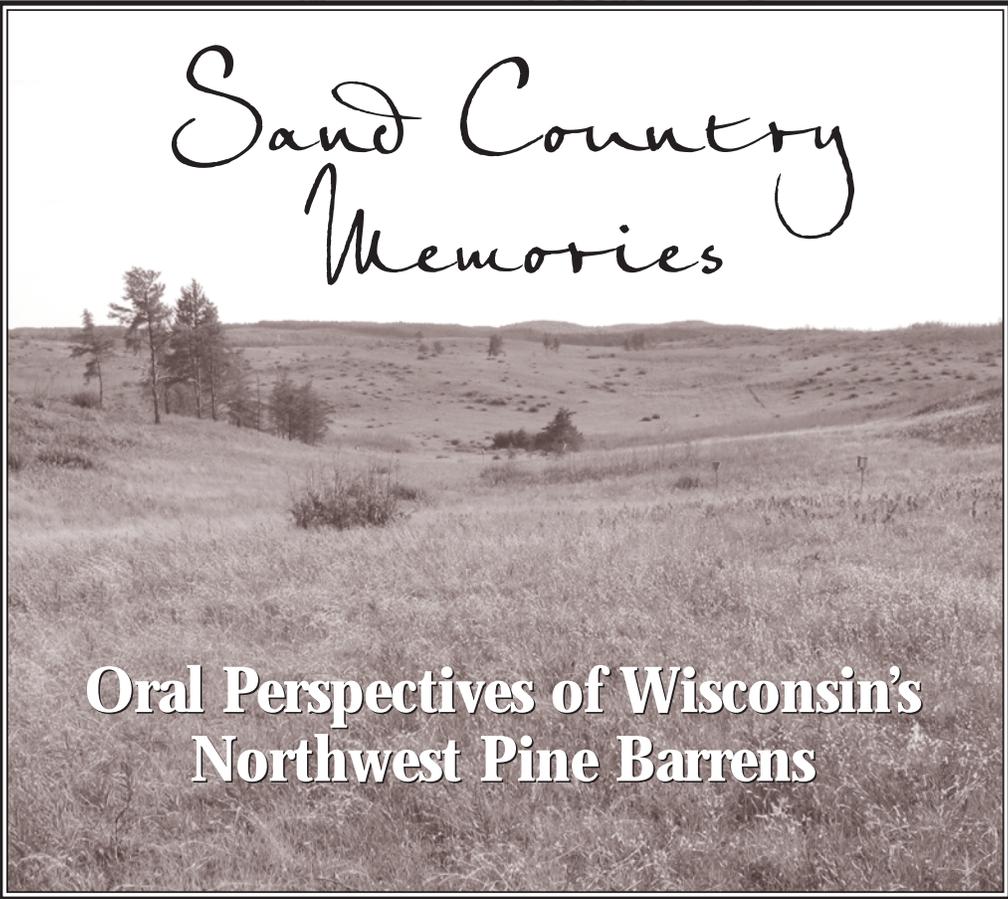




# Sand Country Memories



**Oral Perspectives of Wisconsin's  
Northwest Pine Barrens**

*Susan Cantrell Gilchrist*



*Cover photo courtesy of Eunice Padley.  
Cover illustrations courtesy of the Florida Center for Instructional Technology (FCIT).*

# Sand Country Memories



## **Oral Perspectives of Wisconsin's Northwest Pine Barrens**

Susan Cantrell Gilchrist

Bureau of Science Services  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707

2008



This book is dedicated  
to all those who have ever felt  
they were coming home in the  
Northwest Sands.



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# Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	1
<i>farms</i> .....	9
Sena Borup Christopherson and Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson .....	12
Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren and Donald Lee Shogren .....	13
Raymond Bergerson .....	14
Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr. ....	15
Kay Ramel Karras .....	16
Helen Rein .....	17
Lafayette Connor .....	18
Lolita Spooner Taylor .....	19
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson .....	20
William R. Mason .....	22
Lowell Donald Hoffman .....	23
Marjorie Martell Tutor .....	24
Russell Lester Connor .....	25
Walter (Buck) Follis .....	26
Ardell Lowell Anderson .....	26
Francis Lampella .....	27
Clarence Arthur Wistrom .....	27
<i>forests</i> .....	29
Sena Borup Christopherson and Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson .....	32
Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren and Donald Shogren .....	33
Robert John Becker .....	34
Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr. ....	37
Lyndon Arthur Smith .....	38
Raymond Bergerson .....	39
Kay Ramel Karras and Helen Rein .....	40
Nina May Coos Wicklund and Betty Irene Coos Magnusen, with Berdella Gail Hanson Johnson .....	41
Albert Lorin Lord and Gladys Lord Sampson .....	42
Lafayette Connor .....	43
William Soderbeck and Alice Johnson Soderbeck .....	44
Lolita Spooner Taylor .....	45
Dorothy Frosch .....	45
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson .....	46
William R. Mason .....	47
Thomas Richard Johnson, Andrew Paul Johnson, Daniel Wayne Johnson, and David Eric Johnson .....	48

# Table of Contents

Lowell Donald Hoffman	49
Eugene Connor	49
Michael Newago and Kathryn Munson	50
Franklin Basna	51
Catherine Jones Strharsky and Joseph Strharsky	52
Walter (Buck) Follis	54
Marjorie Martell Tutor	55
Philip Theodore Stromberg	56
Matt Welter	57
Steven C. Coffin	58
Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee	61
Russell Lester Connor	62
Judith Pratt-Shelley	63
Milton Herman Aronson	64
Eleanor Bistram Aronson	65
Joyce Zifco	65
Francis Lampella	66
Nora Searles and Harold Searles	68
Ardell Lowell Anderson and Floyd Lang	68
<i>Berries</i>	69
James Orvin Evrard	72
Robert John Becker	72
Catherine Jones Strharsky and Joseph Strharsky	73
Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren and Donald Lee Shogren	74
Sena Borup Christopherson and Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson	74
Albert Lorin Lord and Gladys Lord Sampson	75
Kay Ramel Karras and Helen Rein	75
Dorothy Frosch and Terry Robert Jordan	76
Lowell Donald Hoffman	76
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson	77
Lyndon Arthur Smith	77
William R. Mason	77
Nina May Coos Wicklund and Betty Irene Coos Magnuson	78
Michael Newago and Kathryn Munson	79
Berdella Gail Hanson Johnson	80
Franklin Basna and Kathryn Munson	82
Walter (Buck) Follis	82
Marjorie Martell Tutor	83
Russell Lester Connor	83

# Table of Contents

## *Berries, continued*

Nora Searles and Harold Searles . . . . .	84
Judith Pratt-Shelley . . . . .	87
Francis Lampella . . . . .	88
Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee . . . . .	88
Matt Welter . . . . .	89
Mariam Esther Lebeck Lang . . . . .	89

## *Fire*

James Orvin Evrard . . . . .	94
Sena Borup Christopherson and Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson . . . . .	95
Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren and Donald Lee Shogren . . . . .	96
Lolita Spooner Taylor . . . . .	97
Raymond Bergerson . . . . .	98
Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr. . . . .	99
Steven C. Coffin . . . . .	99
Robert John Becker . . . . .	100
Lyndon Arthur Smith . . . . .	101
Albert Lorin Lord and Gladys Lord Sampson . . . . .	102
Kay Ramel Karras and Helen Rein . . . . .	103
Lafayette Connor . . . . .	104
Dorothy Frosch . . . . .	105
William Soderbeck and Alice Johnson Soderbeck . . . . .	106
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson . . . . .	107
William R. Mason . . . . .	108
Walter (Buck) Follis . . . . .	108
Lowell Donald Hoffman . . . . .	109
Marjorie Martell Tutor . . . . .	109
Philip Theodore Stromberg . . . . .	110
Russell Lester Connor . . . . .	114
Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee . . . . .	114
Catherine Jones Strharsky and Joseph Strharsky . . . . .	115
Nora Searles and Harold Searles . . . . .	115
Joyce Zifco . . . . .	116
Matt Welter . . . . .	118
Milton Herman Aronson and Eleanor Bistram Aronson . . . . .	119
Francis Lampella . . . . .	120
Clarence Arthur Wistrom . . . . .	120
Judith Pratt-Shelley . . . . .	120

# Table of Contents

<i>Water</i> .....	121
Sena Borup Christopherson and Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson .....	124
Raymond Bergerson .....	125
Donald Lee Shogren .....	126
Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr. ....	127
Albert Lorin Lord and Gladys Lord Sampson .....	128
Robert John Becker .....	130
Kay Ramel Karras and Helen Rein .....	130
Lafayette Connor .....	131
Lolita Spooner Taylor .....	132
William Soderbeck and Alice Johnson Soderbeck .....	134
Dorothy Frosch .....	136
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson .....	136
William R. Mason .....	137
Lowell Donald Hoffman .....	138
Marjorie Martell Tutor .....	138
Eugene Connor .....	139
Catherine Jones Strharsky and Joseph Strharsky .....	140
Nina May Coos Wicklund and Betty Irene Coos Magnuson .....	140
Michael Newago and Kathryn Munson .....	141
Russell Lester Connor .....	142
Franklin Basna .....	143
Nora Searles and Harold Searles .....	144
Milton Herman Aronson and Eleanor Bistram Aronson .....	145
Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee .....	146
Joyce Zifco .....	146
Judith Pratt-Shelley .....	147
Clarence Arthur Wistrom .....	147
<i>Wildlife</i> .....	151
James Orvin Evrard .....	154
Gerald Allen Bartelt .....	155
Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson .....	155
Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren and Donald Lee Shogren .....	156
Lafayette Connor .....	157
Raymond Bergerson .....	158
Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr. ....	159
Robert John Becker .....	160
Lyndon Arthur Smith .....	160

# Table of Contents

## *Wildlife, continued*

Kay Ramel Karras .....	161
Helen Rein .....	161
Albert Lorin Lord and Gladys Lord Sampson .....	162
Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee .....	163
Lolita Spooner Taylor .....	164
William R. Mason .....	164
Dorothy Frosch .....	165
William Soderbeck and Alice Johnson Soderbeck .....	166
Ron Oaks and Chad Oaks .....	167
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson .....	168
Franklin Basna .....	168
Thomas Richard Johnson, Andrew Paul Johnson, Daniel Wayne Johnson, and David Eric Johnson .....	169
Nina May Coos Wicklund and Betty Irene Coos Magnuson .....	170
Catherine Jones Strharsky and Joseph Strharsky .....	170
Michael Newago and Veronica (Babe) Newago .....	171
Walter (Buck) Follis .....	172
Russell Lester Connor .....	174
Eugene Connor .....	175
Matt Welter .....	176
Lowell Donald Hoffman .....	177
Francis Lampella .....	178
Nora Searles and Harold Searles .....	179
Joyce Zifco .....	180
Marjorie Martell Tutor .....	181
Milton Herman Aronson and Eleanor Bistram Aronson .....	182
Ardell Lowell Anderson, Floyd Lang, Donald Lee Shogren, Mariam Esther Lebeck Lang, and Raymond (Bob) Johnson .....	184
Clarence Arthur Wistrom .....	186

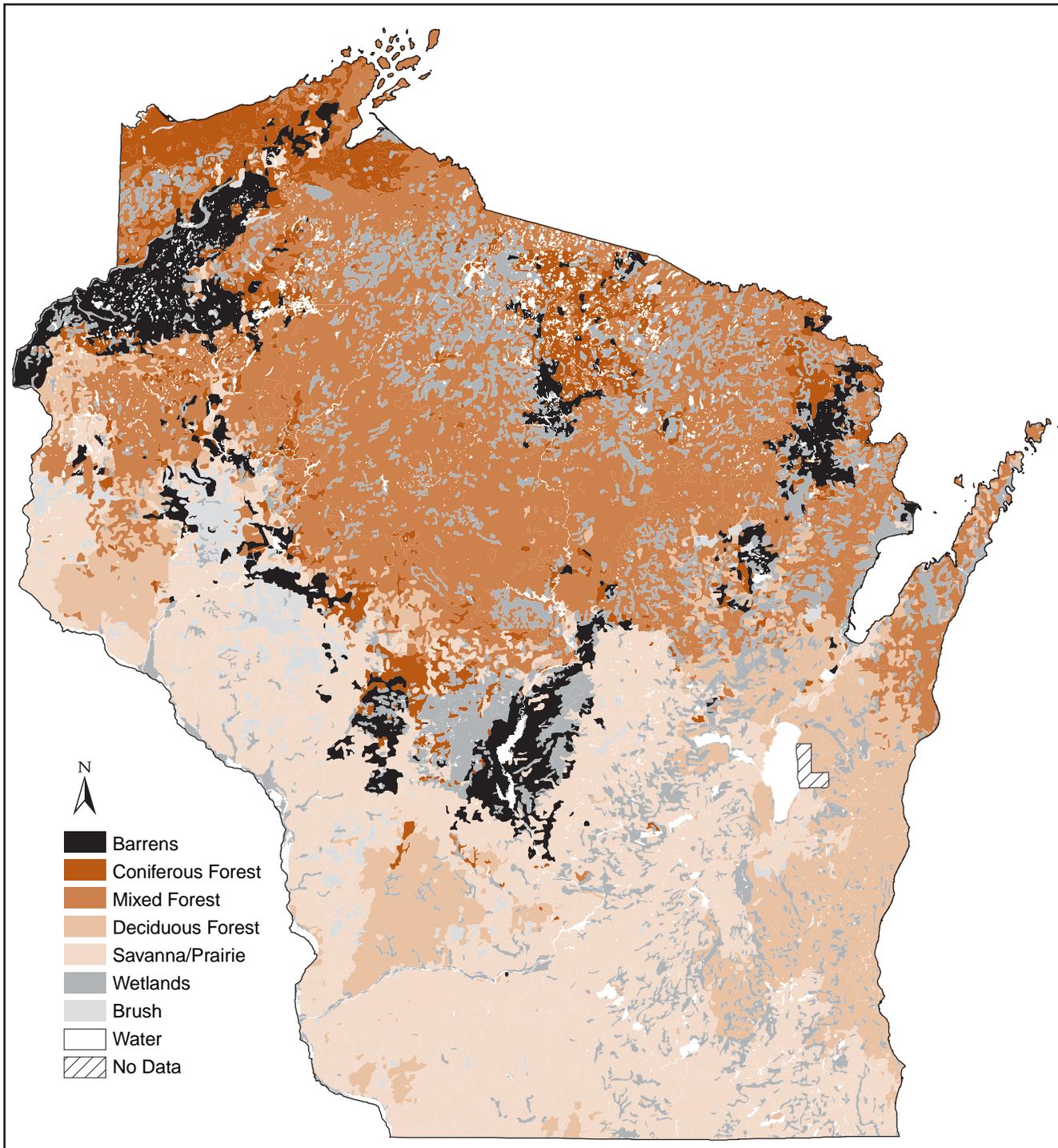
## *People*

James Orvin Evrard .....	190
Sena Borup Christopherson and Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson .....	192
Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren and Donald Lee Shogren .....	193
Raymond Bergerson .....	200
Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr. ....	202
Robert John Becker .....	204
Walter (Buck) Follis .....	205

# Table of Contents

Lyndon Arthur Smith and Grace Maxon Smith	206
Judith Pratt-Shelley	207
Albert Lorin Lord and Gladys Lord Sampson	208
Kay Ramel Karras and Helen Rein	212
Lafayette Connor	214
Lolita Spooner Taylor	216
Dorothy Frosch	218
William Soderbeck and Alice Johnson Soderbeck	220
Betty Donis Lockert Hanson	222
Franklin Basna	225
William R. Mason	226
Lowell Donald Hoffman	228
Nina May Coos Wicklund and Betty Irene Coos Magnuson	230
Catherine Jones Strharsky and Joseph Strharsky	232
Marjorie Martell Tutor	234
Steven C. Coffin	235
Russell Lester Connor	236
Eugene Connor	239
Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee	240
Francis Lampella	241
Joyce Zifco	242
Floyd Lang and Mariam Esther Lebeck Lang	243
Milton Herman Aronson and Eleanor Bistram Aronson	244
Michael Newago and Kathryn Munson	245
Ardell Lowell Anderson	246
William (Willie) David Annis	248
Clarence Arthur Wistrom	252
<i>Appendices</i>	253
A. List of Interviewees	255
B. Messages from Interviewees to Land Management Planners in the Pine Barrens	256
C. Time Line	257
<i>Bibliography</i>	259
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	262

Early vegetation of Wisconsin based on a map compiled from U.S. General Land Office Notes by Robert W. Finley, University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1976. The diagonal swath (shown in solid black) across the northwest corner of the state, from the Mississippi River to Lake Superior, is the Northwest Sands Area. The vegetation here is different than most of the state because the soil is different.



# Introduction



*What is this place called the barrens?*

When I was growing up in Pennsylvania, my mother drove us across New Jersey to the Atlantic shore for family vacations. I noticed scrubby little trees and sand lining the shoulder of the highway. But I never thought of the place as being anything except the way to the seashore. Now I live in the Midwest. It's a long way to the ocean and people talk about going "up north" for vacations rather than "to the shore." One of the places people here reference is "the barrens." I thought about those scrubby pines along the Jersey highway: New Jersey is known for its barrens. But people were talking about barrens *in Wisconsin*. I began to wonder: what is this place called the barrens and what is it that people value so much about it? My interest was roused, and when the opportunity for this project came along, I jumped on board.

Officially this project has been the "Pine Barrens Oral History Project", but this book, the result of the oral history project, has found a life of its own through the voices of the people that I interviewed. *Sand Country Memories* is a thematically organized collection of anecdotes, opinions, and memories from people with a long-term connection to the Northwest Sands Area, one of the original pine barrens sites in Wisconsin. This introduction is the

story of the project and the way I found a sense of place in the barrens, layer by layer, like paint applied to a canvas. The story moves through time, but it starts and ends with the place.

If you look at an early vegetation map of Wisconsin (facing page), you will note a large, diagonal swath across the northwest corner of the state, from the Mississippi River to Lake Superior. This is the Northwest Sands Area. The vegetation in this swath differs from that in most of Wisconsin because the soil is different. Pine barrens have sandy soil. The nature of the soil plays a key role in determining what will and will not grow there. The excessive drainage that occurs through sand makes the region prone to drought and fire. Wisconsin's pine barrens occur in glacial outwash plains and lake bottoms. Generally jack pine, which is dependent on frequent disturbance by fire for regeneration, dominates, along with red pines and oaks. The understory includes aromatic sweet fern, blueberry, and wintergreen. The northern part of the Northwest Sands Area boasts rugged terrains, mixed-pine forests and plantations. The central section is a pitted outwash plain dominated by jack pine. The southern portion is scrub-brush prairie, with short, twisted scrub oaks and open grassy areas decorated by a host of

# Introduction

wildflowers in the summer, and marsh. The barrens is a constantly changing mosaic of forest and opening, like a slow and graceful dance with lines of trees and prairie grass passing one another to a very old-time tune.

Some rare, threatened, or endangered species make their way in the barrens. The Karner blue butterfly depends on the wild lupine that grows there. The Blanding's turtle takes advantage of the sandy soil for nesting. Sharp-tailed grouse are still able to find some of the open prairie or savanna-type habitat that they require in the barrens. With sufficient tree height and canopy cover, Kirtland's warbler, currently surviving in Michigan, may find habitat in Wisconsin's pine barrens. Recovering populations of gray wolves use the barrens for travel corridors and hunting habitat. Knowing these rare creatures might be there, just around the bend, lends a current of excitement to the attentive person.

As pine barrens is a globally rare ecosystem (an "ecosystem" being a natural unit in which the living and nonliving parts interact in a potentially sustainable and self-contained system), and more such barrens exists in Wisconsin than anywhere else in the world (Wisconsin is bigger than New Jersey), natural resource professionals have long been interested in this sandy-soiled region that covers parts of five counties across the wildest region of the state. Smoldering interest in restoring

the barrens to its former glory flickered into flame in the late 1990s. But what area is included in the label "pine barrens," how much of the area could feasibly be restored, and to which historic period should that landscape be restored?

The economic base of the area—timber production for pulp and paper products—depends on the harvesting and replanting of trees, and logging is part of the human heritage there. But some plants and wildlife species historically found in the area require open habitat. In addition, tourists do not always see beauty in land that has just been cutover or burned, and tourism is economically important to the area too. People come there to fish or go boating on the many lakes splattered across the map. Hunters, like homing pigeons, return to the same place year after year. Dog trainers have used the area for generations of dogs. Winter draws people who like to race all-terrain vehicles across remote trails or snowmobile through sparkling solitude. Many families enjoy the tradition of picking blueberries in late summer. People come to the area to see wildflowers, birds, or wildlife, perhaps to feel more a part of the natural world and less apart from it.

Little of the area is still open grassland punctuated with occasional scrub oaks and jack pines, conjuring visions of the pre-European settlement era or the "Wild West" of the 1800s. The working definition



*The barrens is a constantly changing mosaic of forest and opening, like a slow and graceful dance.*



*The economic base of the area depends on the harvesting and replanting of trees, and logging is part of the human heritage there.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

# Introduction

for pine barrens has become the land that is characterized by sandy soil with the potential for being barrens, rather than the land that is currently covered with vegetation typical of pine barrens. Soil rather than vegetation marks the definitive lines drawn on the map, as the soil is more enduring, the vegetation more subject to change. You can see the sand along the side of the road as you drive through the area, whether the road is flanked by housing, pine plantation, or prairie.

A committee, independent from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), joined together to develop a management plan for the Northwest Sands Area. Biological and social scientists collected data and the committee looked at research from a variety of focuses including wildlife such as bird, amphibians, reptiles, and small mammal monitoring, fisheries research, habitat needs of endangered species like the Karner blue butterfly, rural development patterns, and economic interests, particularly in timber and tourism. But landscape scale management goes beyond managing land for a specific crop or a single game species. To manage for a whole ecosystem, land managers must consider the needs and interests of all species that have a stake in the area, including people. The planners wanted to hear what people with an interest in the area remembered about the sand country and they wanted the people there to have a chance

to voice their values about the land. They believed support for the final management plan would be better in the end if people who were invested in the area had an opportunity for input during the planning.

Assisted with a federal grant from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration fund, the DNR asked me to interview some people with long-term connections to the land. With advice from natural resource experts, researchers, and oral historians, I developed a general line of questions that I used with a great deal of flexibility, asking about early memories, living in the sand country, changes over time, and messages to the decision makers:

*What was it like when you were growing up there/first came to the Northwest Sands Area?*

*What do you like/dislike about the sand country?*

*What activities/occupations/recreation have you done in the sand country?*

*How has the area changed and how do you feel about those changes?*

*How would you like the sand country to be 20 years from now?*

*Who are some people who have had an impact on the land in the area?*

*What messages would you like to convey to the land management planners?*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

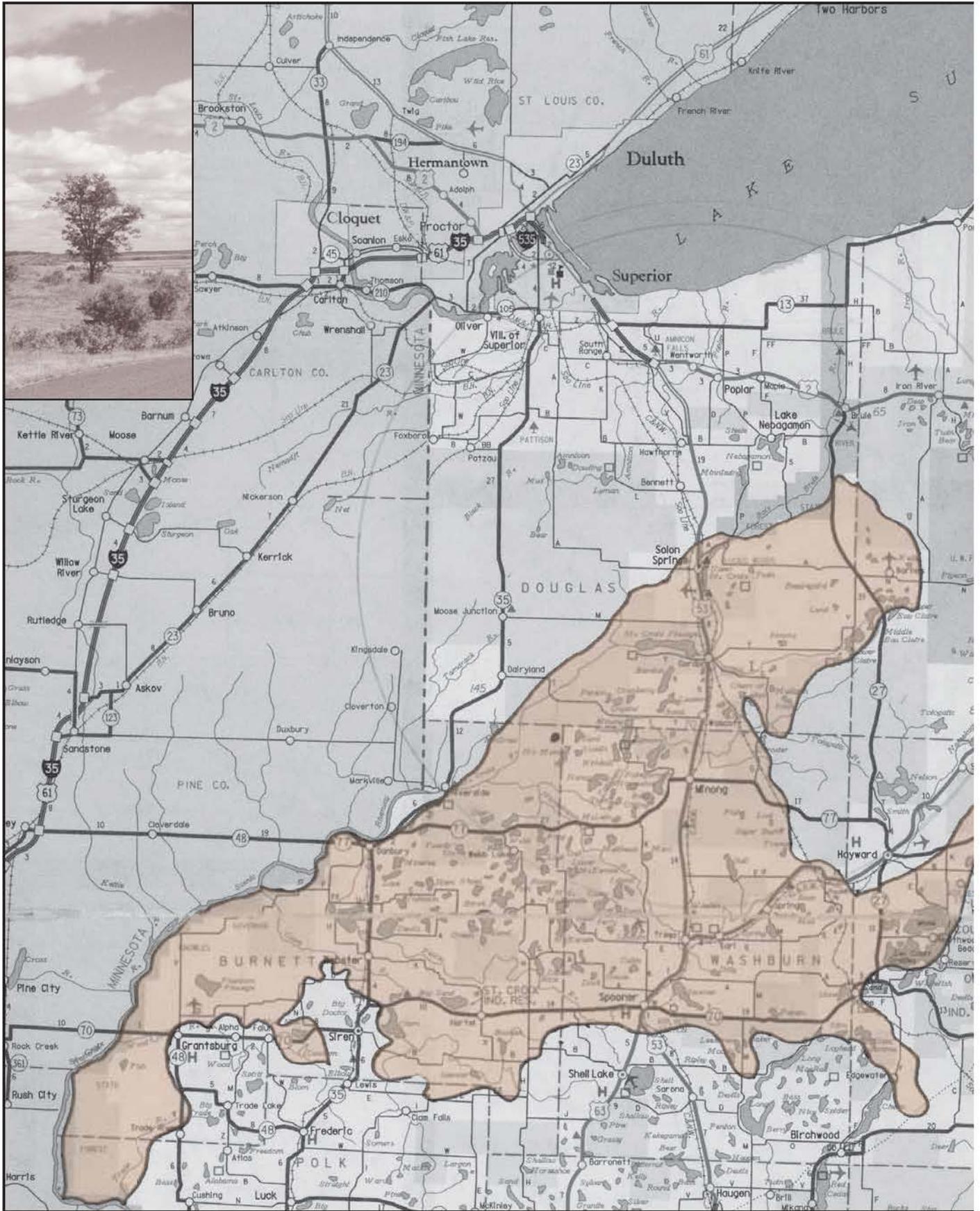
*Soil rather than vegetation marks the definitive lines drawn on the map. You can see the sand along the side of the road.*



JAMES WEBER

*I interviewed people from different parts of the sand country, with a range of birthdates, but they all had a long-term connection to Wisconsin's Northwest Sands Area.*

# Introduction



# Introduction

I took some photographs of the area to elicit perspectives or inspire memories. I used these and a laminated map as visual aids. At the beginning of each interview, I indicated what part of Wisconsin is considered the Northwest Sands Area on the map. During the interview I usually showed the photographs and invited reactions.

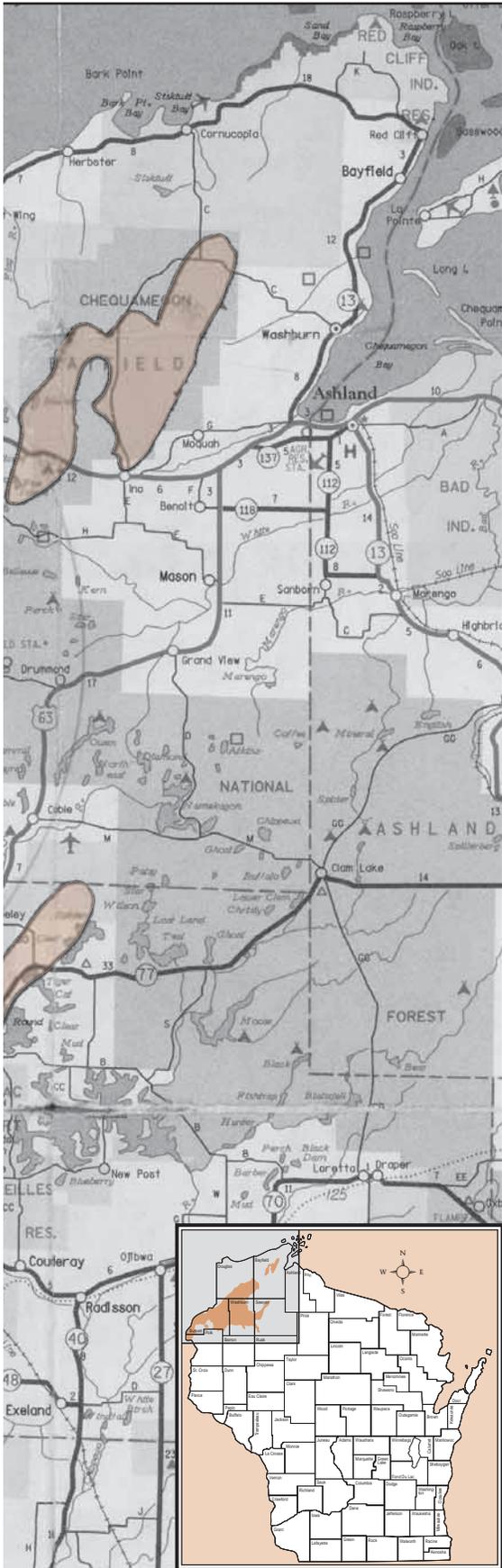
Unless an interviewee demonstrated comfortable use of the phrase “pine barrens” I used the term “sand country” to refer to the area highlighted in the map. Within the text, when interviewees refer to “here” or “there” without specific definition, they are generally referring to the area identified at the start of the interview, the Northwest Sands Area.

It was not hard to find people willing to tell me their stories (see Appendix A: List of Interviewees). I began with a DNR staff person who was also active in the local historical society and one interview name led to another. The people I interviewed were men and women, with birth dates ranging from 1900 to 1971, with most in their 70s or 80s. Their professional training and experience in a natural resources field ranged from extensive to none. Some lived in the area or owned land there, while others just came to the sand country for recreation. I interviewed people from different parts of the sand country, including Grantsburg, Webster, Spooner, Wascott, Solon Springs, Iron River, Washburn, and Red Cliff. Some claimed Norwegian, Swedish, or Finnish descent; some claimed Chippewa heritage; and some defined themselves simply as “American.” But what they all had in common was a long-term connection to Wisconsin’s Northwest Sands Area.

It was my original intention to interview each contact individually, but some preferred to be interviewed with a spouse, friend, or other relative, and the combined interviews worked just as well. I held two small but open group discussions to be as inclusive as possible.

I conducted most of the interviews between the fall of 1998 and the fall of 1999. I interviewed a few additional people and conducted further interviews with some of the same people in 2000–2002. There are many more people I wish I had had opportunity to listen to for this project.

*At the beginning of the interview, I indicated what part of Wisconsin is considered the Northwest Sands Area on a state highway map.*



## Introduction

At the start of the interviews, I asked permission to use the memories shared in research presentations, in written documents such as this one, and in storytelling performances. The people that I met were gracious and generous-spirited. They all had interesting stories to tell and it was clear that most of them really cared about the place. I interviewed most people in their homes, but restaurant, hotel, office, hospital, and outdoor sites worked in some instances too. Most of the interviews were 90 minutes, but I frequently spent three or four hours with the interviewees. I met with a few more than once. Only a couple of people preferred not to be tape-recorded. In most cases, I took photos of the people I interviewed and sent them a copy of the picture afterwards.

After collecting memories, I went over and over the interview notes. Several themes emerged, and they seemed appropriate for an ecosystem study. The stories that jumped out at me gave color to the image of the barrens that was beginning to form in my mind. Farms, forests, berries, and fires – these are key words in understanding the human history of the barrens over the past 100 years. Then I sought out other key elements to flesh out the picture of the ecosystem and found many mentions of wildlife, water, and people. The map began to feel three-dimensional.

Rather than reproducing the memories and perceptions interview by interview, I have collated anecdotes from different respondents together by the categories that emerged from the interview data. I have tried to adhere to the wording and speaking style of the people I interviewed and to convey their meaning as well as I can, without exact transcripts. Since I cut and pasted thematic anecdotes or descriptions out of their original context in drafting each chapter, I sent the drafts back to the interviewees to be reviewed. I incorporated revisions I received. I did not purposely alter the memories or opinions that people expressed to be more “scientifically factual,” “historically accurate,” “politically correct,” or even more “poetic.” I did not necessarily check the accuracy of names, dates, or events against other records. My role was to record things as I was told them to the best of my ability.

These data are not intended to represent historical facts so much as personal perceptions, memories, and opinions. We wanted to know how the people in the barrens perceive things, not what previous texts say. The opinions expressed here are those of the interviewees, not necessarily those of the author, nor do they represent policies or stances held by the DNR.

This research differs from formal oral history in that the information was not geared to a particular



SUSAN GILCHRIST



CRAIG GOLEMBIEWSKI

*After farms, forests, berries, and fires emerged as key themes, I noticed other key elements in the interviews, such as water, wildlife, and people.*

## Introduction

time period or event. The history I learned in school focused on heroes, wars, royalty, and politicians. This document reflects history in snapshots of ordinary life rather than recognized significant events. Some of the memories go back further in the past than others, but many of them refer to the 1930s and 1940s. In addition, I have included things that happened before the interviewee could have experienced them. As “oral history” most aptly refers to history told by the person who experienced it, such accounts fall outside the accepted definition. The term “oral history” can therefore be applied only loosely here, in that the information was collected orally and it does come from the past.

These perspectives were collected for a specific purpose: to provide information for the land management steering committee working in the Northwest Sands Area. Yet researchers always run the risk that perhaps no one will want to know what they’ve found, and I needed an invitation to present at one of the Steering Committee’s meetings. Not everyone initially accepted oral history as “real” data. But thanks to the support of some, I was offered time on the steering committee’s agenda. It was not easy to figure out how to convey hours and hours of conversation and stories into a half-hour summary. I listed the specific messages interviewees asked me to convey

on an overhead transparency (see Appendix B: Messages from Interviewees to the Land Management Planners in the Pine Barrens) and I shared illustrative anecdotes, stories, and memories out loud. Even in that short time, the voices of the people I interviewed were able to have an impact. When I finished my presentation, one older man from the committee jumped up dramatically from his chair and exclaimed excitedly: “Everything she said is true! That’s exactly the way it was!” I knew I had done something right. When the planners took the words of the interviewees to heart and incorporated some of their concerns into the plan they drafted, the oral history project proved worthwhile.

In personal journeys as in myths, the character undergoes some change in the course of the story. So it was for me. I started out knowing little about this place we were calling the sand country or the pine barrens. I had visited Crex Meadows, near Grantsburg, to see wildlife and had watched sharp-tailed grouse dance at dawn. I had been to Ashland for a meeting or two. I remember when my windshield wipers broke on a Saturday when the rain was pelting down. The mechanic at the dealership in Ashland actually pirated the part I needed from a new car so I could drive the five hours home safely. But I had no particular connection to the area that stretches through



*This story moves through time, but it starts and ends with this rugged, remote, and beautiful place.*



*When I walked across the hills and found an old and overgrown graveyard, I felt my own roots sink comfortably into the soil.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

# Introduction



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*When I heard the sandhill cranes returning like delegates from ancient times, I felt part of the continuum from past to present.*

Grantsburg, Webster, Spooner, Minong, Iron River, Washburn, and Red Cliff. It held no context in my life. Then, one evening, I drove into Spooner and I felt my heart skip the proverbial beat. I recognized the same feeling I have felt every time I drive down the hill from the Pennsylvania turnpike on Route 100 and look down and see my mother's house, the place where I grew up. It's a sense of coming home. Now, I have associations with Wisconsin's northwest barrens. I remember driving round and round the same few blocks to see all the Christmas lights one December night when I stayed in Spooner conducting interviews. I remember offers of coffee and cake and the woman who brought me fresh-baked cookies to eat on the long drive home from Grantsburg. When people invited me into their homes and told me about the death of someone they loved or the way they met their husband or wife, the family stories that were passed down, the time they were truly frightened in a fire, or the time that they did something "naughty" as a child, when I laughed with them, looked at their family photos, listened to their sorrow, and ate their food, I began to realize that I am no longer separate from them. When I walked across the hills, visited a former one-room schoolhouse, found an old and overgrown graveyard, read the sign by the old CCC camp foundation, watched an

osprey or swan at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, I felt my own roots sink comfortably into the soil, the way water colors blur into the grain of wet paper. When I saw miles of bluebird boxes people set up around the Moquah Barrens, visited a cranberry bog with hundred year old vines, stood beside a quiet pond in the woods, heard the sandhill cranes returning like delegates from ancient times, noticed passing trucks perpetually piled high with logs, and watched the roadsides for inevitable deer at dusk, I felt part of the continuum from past to present, as it stretched around my experience like a sturdy and definitive frame. I was forming attachments to the place. I felt touched when I was invited to stay overnight in someone's home, and I was aware that some of the people I had begun relating to as interviewees were really becoming my friends. I felt saddened when I heard someone I had interviewed had moved to a nursing home and bereft when I learned another I had eaten apple pie with had died. The people I interviewed have become significant to me and I learned to care about the place they showed me, through their eyes.

It is my hope that sharing these perspectives, anecdotes, memories, stories, and opinions will bring a sense of this beautiful, rugged, remote, and rare place in Wisconsin to the readers, through the eyes of some of the people who value it, largely because it has been home. It is my hope that researchers and educators will read this collection and see oral memories and personal perceptions as a valid and valuable form of data. It is also my hope that reading these perspectives of the sand country will inspire you to collect similar images of the place where you feel that you are coming home.

# Farms



STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

*Betty pretended she was Judy Garland,  
singing and dancing down the cowpath.  
It was a wild, free life in the sand country.  
You could holler and nobody  
could hear you.*

*Earl had to sell 80 acres to put  
a new roof on his tarpaper shack.  
He tried hard to make a living  
in the sandy soil, but it was  
the soil that beat him.*



# Farms



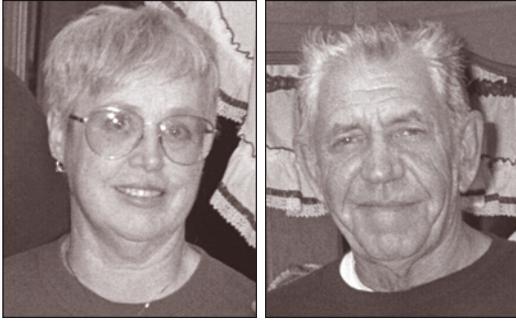
COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*People homesteaded the sand country because they didn't have to clear many trees. But once they broke up the ground, the topsoil blew away, and there was nothing left but sand.*

**M**any interviewees grew up on farms, so this topic emerged as very significant. People reminisced about how they worked and played in the sand country when they were young. The Northwest Sands Area remains generally a rural area.

Farms were clearly an important category to cover in trying to develop any understanding of the sand country as a specific place and over time. When people of European descent came to the Northwest Sands Area to settle, it was frequently the open land that drew them to that place. Homesteaders came. For a time there was a belief that farming was to be the wave of success that washed northwest Wisconsin, but drought, coupled with new health regulations, new but hard to afford technology, and the general economic depression of the 1930s, shriveled such expectations. Depleted and dried out, the sandy soil blew away. Unless farmers had additional income sources, many farms failed. Tax delinquent lands were purchased by the county, state, or federal government, creating the large and apparently much appreciated public lands in the area.

Today there are still some active farms in the Northwest Sands Area, but there are far fewer than there once were, and they operate with different technology now. Some people have come to think pine is the best crop the area can produce, rather than the traditional farm crops of yesteryear. Changes in the use of the land, initially to agriculture and now to other things, such as recreation, certainly affect the entire ecosystem.



**Sena Borup Christopherson**

*Born: November 26, 1941*

**Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**

*Born: July 11, 1934*

BUDDY AND HIS WIFE, SENA, LIVE IN the Grantsburg area. Sena's ancestors homesteaded in the sand country. They initially came to the Midwest from New England. Then, in 1877, they came from Minnesota to Wisconsin in two covered wagons with sixteen head of cattle and a team of horses. But the land wore out for farming. The house is no longer there. Crex Meadows Wildlife Area covers the map in that place now. (Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, generally referred to as Crex Meadows or sometimes just Crex, is a 30,097 acre prairie-wetland complex owned and operated by the Wisconsin DNR. It is located north of Grantsburg in Burnett County. Begun in 1946, when the state purchased 12,000 acres of tax delinquent land, Crex Meadows is now the largest state-owned wildlife area in Wisconsin.) Two children's graves mark the place where the homestead once was.

Buddy's dad also farmed. It was easy clearing the land there, so people settled in the sand country. But the topsoil was light. During the drought of the 1930s most of the farms went out of business. They couldn't grow anything but hay for the livestock and potatoes for the starch factory in Grantsburg.

For a while Buddy drove the Falun milk route, covering 75 miles with 55 patrons, mostly little farmers with two, three, or four cows. He earned \$3.50 a month per farmer for picking up the milk and cream every day. Buddy delivered the cream to the creamery where it was made into butter. There used to be a number of creameries around, but now there's just Burnett Dairy. There aren't many farms there now either.

*During the drought of the 1930s most of the farms went out of business.*



*For a time there was a belief, promoted by real estate agents, that farming was to be the wave of success that washed northwest Wisconsin, but this was misleading.*



*Wagons lined up to deliver potatoes to the Grantsburg Starch Factory.*

PHOTOS: STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN



**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**

*Born: December 8, 1928*

**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

LOIS AND HER HUSBAND DON LIVE IN Grantsburg on the old Skog Homestead, the same place Lois was raised. In 1862, her great-great-grandfather came from Sweden and homesteaded that site. Lois' house is built right on the same spot where the old house was. She has a painting of her grandparents' house that was done in the late 1800s by a roving painter.

Growing up on the farm provided a good childhood. She and her siblings skied in winter and played outside in summer. She especially remembered kitten ball, or softball. Every town had a baseball team. Of course, she had farm chores and gardening to do. While she didn't think her city cousins did anything, she was picking blueberries and chokecherries by the bucket and learning cooking and baking from her mother.

Don was raised in Fish Lake, lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, for years, then retired back to the Wisconsin barrens. People homesteaded the sand country before they settled the heavier soil because the area was open prairie, and they didn't have to clear many trees, Don said. They could start farming right away, but once they broke up the ground, the topsoil blew off, and there was nothing left but sand. When people couldn't grow anything any more, they moved away.

When he was a boy, Don's family grew corn and a lot of potatoes. His chores included fixing fences and milking cows. Helping cows calve was an every day occurrence. He'd grab the calves by the front legs and pull.

When farming didn't work out, the county bought people out and made the land public,

turning old farms into forest crop by planting trees. Now it's easier for people to live out there. When Don was a kid, he didn't have electricity or school bus transportation, but now school buses take the kids to school. Don can see why people like the barrens: it's still wild land.

*Don sees why people like the barrens: it's still wild land.*



*Lois has a painting of her grandparents' house that was done in the late 1800s.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Raymond Bergerson**  
Born: March 4, 1913



*Ray's family harvested oats for some years.*

RAY WAS BORN IN MINNESOTA AND now lives in Forest Lake, Minnesota. Up until recently, he's visited the sand country a couple of times a year. Ray is an active supporter of Crex Meadows Wildlife Area.

Ray said he never wanted to live in the sand country. He remembers how the soil eroded and the sand blew during the dry years. When you ate, you tasted sand. It drifted under the window. His stepmother complained about cleaning up the sand from the floor.

Ray's dad, Arndt Bergerson, bought the sandy land as wild land, then grubbed it. Ray can remember leading the horse with a stump puller. His dad wouldn't have a farm with a rock on it; he wanted sand. Ray would rather have had rock than sand burrs. He said you could tell the quality of the soil by the trees that grew on it. Scrubby oaks signified poor land.

His dad bragged about harvesting 95 bushels of oats per acre the first year, but every year after that the harvest decreased as the soil lost its fertility. Then it would yield only 30 bushels per acre. They worked the soil too hard.

Ray hated the sand burrs that grew in the corn and potato fields. Sand burrs won't grow in fertile soil, he explained. He had to carry bushel baskets of sand burrs home and burn them. His dad was fussy; he didn't want any weeds in his fields.

They grew potatoes in sand until the early 1930s; then they grew them down on the peat ground. They raised 200–250 bushels per acre

on the peat ground. They had good crops in the dry years, but the peat ground dried up and burned off, right down to the sand.

The farmers had drained the Grantsburg bogs so they could raise hay. Then they had to put in a well to irrigate. Now the water level's too high; you can't farm the peat ground either. Now they grow sod instead of food.

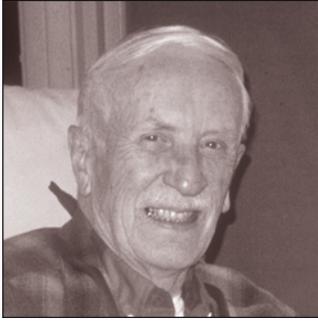
In the dry years, moonshine was the only income some of the farmers had. Most of the farmers starved out. Either the state bought the land, or people just walked off it in the 1930s. But it's no longer farming country anyway.

The best use for the open country, since corn or grain crops won't thrive there, may be as a cemetery, because it's easy digging. It was heavy dairy country years ago, but only two dairies remain in the area now. He'd like to leave the land just like it is, but he acknowledges that no one can afford to own unproductive land there, when they can sell it for housing.



*Most of the farmers starved out. Either the state bought the land or people just walked off it in the 1930s. It's no longer farming country.*

COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



**Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr.**

*Born: August 18, 1926*

BUD FIRST CAME TO THE SAND country in 1952 as a biologist to conduct sharp-tailed grouse surveys. Later, he bought land near Trego, north of Spooner. He loved the region and wanted to return to it. He loved the lakes, streams, diversity of wildlife, the hunting and canoeing, the forests, and the sandy soil. He was inspired by Aldo Leopold's work managing bankrupt, sandy soil north of Baraboo, Wisconsin, as described in Leopold's famous book, *Sand County Almanac*, and by Wallace Grange, who started his Sandhill Game Farm near Babcock, in the central Wisconsin sands.

Bud and a partner bought the Pillbean Farm at the county tax deed sale when the land went up for sale because of unpaid taxes. The soil there was infertile and sandy, and the people who tried to farm it just couldn't make it. When Bud arrived at the place they had bought, two dogs were barking from the hayloft door. A Chippewa family was living in the hayloft of the barn, without water or heat. The family had to move out. Bud and his partner sold the barn to a neighbor, who tore it down, board by board, to fix his own barn. They planted the 80-acre farm to pine.

Now that farm's gone, and the place is used as a rural home for people who live in an urban area. Bud and his wife, Marilyn, bought another 80 acres from Earl Shingo, a likable, short fellow with a full head of hair and a creased, wrinkled face, always ready to laugh. Earl and his wife, who was part Canadian Chippewa and was blind, had tried farming, but they just couldn't

make it. Earl cut brush on the road to earn what he could. He and his wife lived in a tar paper shack with a well outside, a garden, and an out-house. They sold 80 acres of land to Bud so they could manage to fix the roof on the shack.

*"It was the soil  
that beat them."*

Bud remembers that on one trip out there he got about a hundred ticks on him when a hazel bush he walked under rained ticks. He took off his shirt and shook the ticks out. There were no ticks on Earl. Wearing his bib overalls and a long-sleeved shirt, Earl laughed at Bud for being a city slicker. The ticks were bear ticks; they didn't know about deer ticks then. It was years later that Bud got Lyme disease. There is a high incidence of Lyme disease in western Wisconsin, where the sandy soils are, he said.

When Bud sold the land in the late 1980s, he heard what had happened to Earl and his wife in the mid-1970s. During deer season, the neighbor hadn't seen smoke coming out of the tarpaper shack for awhile, and he saw no tracks in the snow. He just figured Earl and his wife were gone. But Earl didn't have a car. After a couple of weeks, the neighbor found their bodies. Earl had died of a heart attack. Blind and helpless, with no phone, his wife froze to death sitting in a chair. They'd tried hard to make a living on the sandy soil and failed. "It was the soil that beat them."



**Kay Ramel Karras**  
*Born: June 19, 1918*

KAY WAS THE YOUNGEST OF FIFTEEN. She loved the freedom of growing up in the sand country, and she loved the good neighbors. She remembers scrubbing clothes on a washboard as one of her chores.

Kay went to a little country school west of Solon Springs, with eight grades in one room. The teacher had to get there early to start the fire. Once Kay skipped school and played the afternoon away in the woods. Her brother told her dad, and she got spanked for it. She never skipped school again, at least in that school. When she went to high school, she had to walk three and a half miles each way to school each day.

Her dad moved to Wisconsin from South Dakota in 1914. He worked on the railroad and farmed; he raised cattle, horses, chickens, geese, turkeys, and ducks. Like many other farmers, he worked in logging camps in the winter. Everything was done with horses in those days, both farming and logging. While her dad cultivated the corn

*Bologna and "boughten" bread were treats!*

fields, Kay rode the horse to keep it in line. Her dad was going blind, and she rode with him when she was only five, to watch for rocks in front of the sickle when he was mowing. Her dad didn't want her to ride the work horses other times, but she'd sneak down to ride them anyway. He said the horses should rest on Sunday. When she brought the cows in, she used to jump on the last cow and ride her home.

She helped her mom too. They had 1,000 quarts of canned food. Her dad smoked ham and bacon. They had their own fresh meat. Her mom baked bread. Bologna and "boughten" bread were treats! Kay liked to put a piece of bread on top of the cream can and put cinnamon and sugar on it. Her mom found the crumbs, and that was the end of the cream sandwiches. Her mom bawled them out, skimmed the crumbs off the cream, and shipped the can away.

Kay remembers being hungry during the Great Depression and not having enough money to pay for a three-cent stamp. Her mom made clothing out of feed sacks. She remembers wearing underwear made out of feed sacks.

But times changed and she grew up. Her siblings left home, and she stayed there to take care of her parents until they both died. People are no longer farming. Now they're planting trees in plantations.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*People are no longer farming. Now they're planting trees in plantations.*



**Helen Rein**

*Born: October 9, 1918*

HELEN'S DAD HOMESTEADED ON THE barrens. She was born and raised there, the youngest in a family of ten. She said she was called "spoiled," but she did chores along with everyone else. She filled the wood box and pumped and carried water. She trapped gophers that dug holes in the field and ruined the crops. She had to bring the cows home, riding on old Daisy. She remembers that her dad sold Daisy, their pet rider cow.

Helen's dad was a farmer and a logger. As a farmer, he raised cattle, horses, chickens, geese, turkeys, and ducks, all right on the river. He sold cream. They never pasteurized anything, and nobody got sick from it. They churned their own butter. Helen ran the separator, to separate the cream from the milk.

During the Great Depression, there were hard times. Health laws were passed so there was no more raw milk allowed. Some farmers, like her dad, couldn't afford extra equipment like refrigeration for milk and cream. You couldn't separate the milk and cream and just leave it set until the can was full. Her dad gave up farming in the 1930s, when Helen was in high school. The boys left home, and there was too much work for her dad alone. There weren't as many trucks to pick up and deliver the milk as there had been. Farms were so small and scattered that it didn't pay for anyone to come and pick up the milk and deliver it 32 miles to Superior.

Helen's family always had plenty to eat on the farm, but Helen had only one pair of shoes to

*They churned their own butter. Helen ran the separator, to separate the cream from the milk.*



wear. She ran barefooted all summer, with one pair of shoes to wear to Sunday school. For Sunday school, she changed out of the overalls she wore to work on the farm and put on a dress and hat. Even her dad dressed up on Sunday. They ordered their clothes through the catalog. One year Sears made a mistake and sent a double order. She had two hats the same.

Her dad bought a Model T Ford around 1926 or '27, when she was seven or eight. They all had to jump out and push the car up the sand hill, then jump back in to go to Sunday school.

Helen hated the city. When she went there, she couldn't get home fast enough. The sand country was home. But her farm is now a resort, the old fields are a campground, and people from the city come there for recreation.



GERALD BARTELT



**Lafayette Connor**  
*Born: March 29, 1900*

FAYE LIVED TO BE 101 YEARS OLD.

I interviewed Faye twice in his home in Webster, Wisconsin. He was born and raised near Webster. His mother's folks came from Norway, and his father had a Chippewa-Irish heritage. His father's mother was Chippewa, and his father's dad was a "part Indian" fur trader.

When his mother married his dad, they had nothing but a few chickens. When they wanted to have a baby, his mom said she had to have a cow. His dad went to the cow sale, but all the cows were gone except for a longhorn cow with swollen udders. His mother milked it, and the cow made a grateful sound. Even though his mother was worried about the horns, she dickered and bought the cow for \$8.00. She led the longhorn cow out and tied it to the lumber wagon on which they had come to town. "What is that thing?" Faye's dad asked. His mother defended her purchase, saying it was a pet. She was willing to walk all the way home to lead the cow, if necessary, but the cow walked faster than the horses. It was the only longhorn in the county: a milk cow raised as a beast of burden. The cow was sold because it had developed an ulcer on the back of the neck where the yoke fit. Faye's parents bred the cow to a farm bull, and it gave them three calves. That cow weighed about 800 pounds. When Faye was little, he drank its milk. He said his mother babied that cow. He remembers how he'd brush flies off its ears and then hang on the ears. They called her Bessie. Neighbors came over just to look at such an unusual cow.



*Even though Faye's mother was worried about the horns, she dickered and bought the longhorn for \$8.00.*

Growing up on a farm meant hard work. The only cash his dad ever saw was from selling cream, potatoes, and corn. Faye remembers the first corn they raised: it was red, blue, and green, the old Indian corn. The children had a half-acre to raise a garden. His dad paid him to take care of his own garden, but then Faye had to buy his own coveralls. He went without a shirt all summer. In the fall they sold potatoes for fifty cents a bushel. He said they moved from the homestead where they lived in a log house to the farm when he was about five.

Faye says the land hasn't changed so much as people's thinking has changed since those childhood days. Everybody tried to farm there at one time, but that's all gone now. They couldn't raise anything. There wasn't enough good soil. The farmers died off, and the children went to the city. Then the tourists came in and bought up the land around the lakes. Faye didn't like to see the newcomers come into the area; they spoiled the land. But "it just happens," he said. "You get used to it." He liked it better when they started to grow forests. "It was the only thing you could do to save the land," he said.



**Lolita Spooner Taylor**  
*Born: July 19, 1908*

ONE-EIGHTH OJIBWA, LOLITA IS SECOND cousin to Lafayette Connor. Lolita lived around Webster, Wisconsin, all her life and taught school in Webster for thirty years. She has known the sand burrs, sand roads, and blueberry patches of the barrens well and appreciates the charm of the different flowers that bloom in the sand country. She likes to go see the lupines and wild onions at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, and she loves the blue of the bottle gentians.

In 1902, there was an effort to encourage immigration to Burnett County, which was advertised as wonderful farming land. A real estate man, Edward L. Peet, published a small book extolling the value of the timber and soil. There are still evidences of failed farms where you will see a clump of lilac bushes and perhaps some bouncing bets. "That's real sand country," she said. "Once the trees were taken off, there was nothing left except flowers and ducks in a puddle."

Lolita's grandfather, William Connor, was a surveyor and locator. He showed people where their homesteads were. Her father carried mail from the Orange post office to Grantsburg and back. That was a distance of some 30 miles driving a team of broncos imported from the "Wild West."

When she was growing up, her family had cattle. She went after the cows and helped with the hay and grain harvests. While others milked the cows, she washed dishes, heating the water on the stove first. One time when she and her sister were supposed to be doing dishes, they tied paper on the cat's feet and watched its antics. They rolled on



*School closed for two weeks in the fall so the kids could pick potatoes.*

the floor laughing until they saw the lantern coming and had to do the dishes quickly.

Like other farm kids, she went barefooted. She loved the feel of warm sand on her feet. She enjoyed swimming in Connor's Lake and she liked sports like basketball and volleyball. She was captain of the girls' basketball team. The girls played before the boys, "to warm the crowd up." Girls' basketball was played on half a court then. But Lolita was quick to point out that women had a respected voice in the way things were done in the community.

There were big farms near Webster when she was a kid. In some parts of the county, potatoes were the big crop. Potatoes take good topsoil, and for some, they were the first crop after the land was cleared. Grantsburg, Burnett County's first county seat, had a starch factory in the early days. Wagon loads of potatoes were hauled to that town. Those were the days when they had potato-digging vacations in the schools. School closed for two weeks in the fall so the kids could pick potatoes. When the starch factory was no longer there, and the soil was more fit for corn and oats, farmers changed their crops and grew fewer potatoes. Soybeans and, later, sunflowers became profitable crops. Now many of the big farms have been planted to pines. Some farms remain in the southern and eastern parts of the county. Burnett Dairy is a fine cheese factory near Grantsburg that is supported by dairy farms both in and outside the area.



**Betty Donis Lockert Hanson**

*Born: January 18, 1934*

BETTY GREW UP IN THE FISH LAKE area and currently owns land and a hunting cabin near there. She was one of five children in the Lockert family, so there was always something to do. She liked to play among the oak trees behind the house. She'd scrape the grass out and set up little matchstick farms for hours of imaginative play. Out in the woods, she concocted "houses" among the trees, in the brush. When the corncrib was empty, the kids swept it up. They took in an old automobile seat as a couch. There they made mud pies. Once they stole an egg from the hen house and mixed it with mud for a "cake." This may have been a brave thing to do, for they were afraid of the roosters. They frosted the "cake" with cow salt. Her brother was the designated baker. They played house all summer long. In the winter, they made paper dolls by cutting pictures out of the Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogues. It was the end of the paper dolls, however, when they fell out of her brother's schoolbook, and he was embarrassed.

There were five children within six years, though Betty never thought of that as a hardship. Her parents farmed. They grew soybeans, oats, and corn. The kids had their own pickle and bean patches. They sold their crops to the pickle factory in town. She preferred picking pickles to beans because with the beans, you never got done. Sometimes they'd hollow the big, fat pickles out. They made boats with them and floated them in the cow tanks. At the factory, people separated the cucumbers into sizes. The nice little ones were worth more. She saw the conveyor belts carrying the cucumbers away and the big wooden vats

pickles soaked in. When she brought her crop in, it was weighed, and she was paid with a check the same day. The kids clothed themselves for school with their pickle and bean money.

Betty's family had no electricity until 1954. The neighbors didn't have it either. Her family didn't have a phone for many years, although the neighbors did. They got water from a pump outside and used an outhouse. When they pumped water for the cows, they counted the pump strokes to make it fair among the siblings. She got big muscles from pumping. She'd comb her hair and her muscles would flex.

There was just one season they raised and sheared sheep. It made their hands feel like silk from the lanolin in the wool, but it just wasn't a paying proposition.

Betty said they did things the hard way then. Her dad farmed with horses. The kids steered while he went behind the plow. Colonel and Bird were the work-horses. She'd ride the horse all day long, steering, while her dad plowed behind. She'd bring her dad lunch at midday. She'd walk down the ruts made by the plow. Though the sand was hot, it was cool in the furrows on her bare feet, if she could get over the sand burrs. Wonderful potatoes grew in the sand. The potatoes were for their family's use, not to sell. You appreciated what you got from the land, with just good ol' manure for fertilizer.

Betty's family had Brown Swiss cows with rich milk. They sold the cream. They had a separator that was about four feet tall. You dumped the milk in the top and then turned the crank. It was



*"Wonderful potatoes grow in the sand."*

the kids' job to turn that separator. Betty liked to watch the cream come out one spout and the thin drinking milk come out of the other. The Flannigan kids, city people from Chicago who moved there, liked to watch it too. They came up every night to see that separator. It was a chore to wash it every night; that was Betty's mother's job. Overall, it was a team effort.

At most they probably milked ten cows; it was hard to feed more. One favorite memory is going out to the north pasture to get the cows. She thought "pasture" meant "woods," because that's where her cows had to go. She would become Judy Garland, singing and dancing down the cow path, her dog at her heels. It's surprising she ever heard the cowbells, she was so busy performing. The cows had to struggle to find enough to eat, so they wore cowbells to help her find them in

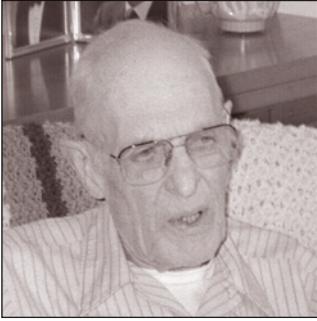
their wanderings. When they'd lie down, they'd have to toss their heads to get the flies off, and that would ring the bell. Sometimes the cows would meander way down the road. Without fences, it was hard to find them. Undaunted, Betty would take the horse to find the cows. She'd be Dale Evans or some other cowgirl then. One time, when she was about fourteen, she was riding Colonel. The deer flies were so bad they were driving the horse crazy. Colonel was a spirited horse anyway. She grabbed a branch to get the deer flies away from the horse's ears. The horse spooked and ran all the way to the barn. Betty doesn't know how she hung on that time. Maybe she was too scared to fall off. That certainly was the worst ride of her life, and she sure had weak knees when she got off!

The sand country itself hasn't changed, Betty explained, but the farms are gone. In 1951, her dad quit farming and sold his cows. The kids had grown up and moved on so he had no help. The railroad quit coming through then too, so her dad couldn't add to his income by cutting pulp and shipping it by rail any more. In 1957, he went to the Twin Cities to work and just came home on the weekends. Betty still likes to see a few fields of corn. "It feels good to see a few crops," she said. Now there are no farms from her place south, she says. Once she had five neighbors she hardly knew; now there are many people all over. Growing up in the sand country was a free, private life. You could holler, and nobody could hear you. But it would have been lonely without a big family.



*Betty's family had Brown Swiss cows with rich milk. When she went out to get the cows, she would become Judy Garland, singing and dancing down the cow path.*

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



**William R. Mason**

*Born: September 8, 1923*

BILL MOVED TO THE GRANTSBURG area with his parents, when he was about ten years old. He explained that the sand country was settled because it was easy to clear. People farmed it and then moved on because there was plenty of land, but it wasn't the best farmland. People with cattle were able to stay longer. The people who had built the house that Bill moved into had farmed the land heavily, so there was plenty of pasture for cattle. A lot of the area was farm fields when he moved there. His family moved to that area because they knew some people there, and they couldn't afford the better farmland elsewhere. Land was available during the Great Depression as a lot of people were moving out because they couldn't pay their back taxes.

But Bill's family didn't have high rent to pay during the Great Depression. They'd just started farming in 1928, so they had just purchased everything they needed before the Depression hit. Bill's dad took a mortgage on the cattle. When the banker asked for more payment, Bill's dad said the bank could take some of the cattle. You couldn't sell surplus cattle because it cost too much to ship them to a place to sell them. His dad did trucking and other things to make an extra dollar.

Bill's dad was a railroad man and rented the farm out until Bill and his wife farmed it. Bill said it was all going "back to nature" now. "They planted in all those fields. It's all timberland." Bill said sandy land is not practical for farming; he hopes we don't have to depend on the sandy land for raising food. He liked the countryside better when it was open fields and

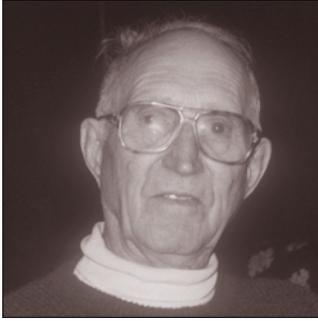
farms, but the land is better suited to raising timber to keep people supplied with paper and other forest products. "Now it's woods." And the meadows that used to be used for hay? "Now they're just swamps."

*Bill said it was all going  
"back to nature" now.*



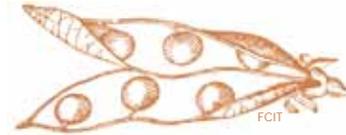
*Lowell pretty much lived on a tractor. He never got tired of driving one.*

ROBERT QUEEN



**Lowell Donald Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*



*Lowell's family raised peas*

LOWELL LIVES IN GRANTSBURG. HE moved to the area in 1918 when he was only five months old. He grew up on a farm that was adjacent the sandy soils of the barrens, but had better soil. However, he did walk three to five miles to the scrub brush prairie to play or swim, and his neighbor brought the cows there to graze. He remembers getting lots of exercise rolling a tire, rolling a hoop, going out to the woods to get the cows, or running up an old tree that rested at a 45 degree angle to see how far he could get up the trunk. He played baseball a lot, putting tape on the ball when it wore out, and hockey, using a tree branch as a hockey stick. He carried wood to the house, milked cows, and drove the team of four horses, all when he was still a boy.

The horses he drove pulled a leveler with spikes on a bar to break up the clods of earth. The fields looked beautiful when they were done. They left space between the cornrows so you could take care of the weeds. Today, farmers just spray with herbicides, Lowell said.

In about 1922, when Lowell was about five years old, his dad bought a tractor. Lowell rode hanging onto the fender; he didn't drive it until he was about fourteen, because he had to be able to make the turn and operate the lifting lever at the same time. He pretty much lived on a tractor; he never got tired of driving one. He fell off a full wagon-load of hay one time, when the wagon hit a rock. He landed ungracefully on the hard gravel and hurt his hip.

In the 1930s and 40s, 45–50 bushels was a good yield. Then they started using combines instead

of corn pickers. When he was a boy, Lowell picked corn by hand. He was a good picker: he tried to keep “an ear in the air all the time.” He bounced the corn against the backboard and it fell into the wagon.

Lowell's family raised peas. They cut them and loaded them on a wagon and delivered them to the vinery either in the evening or before daybreak so the sun couldn't dry out the peas. At the vinery, they took the peas off the vines by machines, and then shipped them to Frederic for canning. One time Lowell took a load of peas to the vinery in a company wagon, deposited the load and headed for home around 11:00 p.m. These wagons used the public roads without lights. There was another man helping him with another wagon-load of peas. In the pitch black of the night, they didn't see each other, and the horses didn't make a sound. It was frightening to suddenly have another wagon appear beside you out of nowhere. They raised cucumbers and beans for the pickle factory too; they picked them by hand.

Lowell was deferred from fighting in World War II to work on his farm. After the war, the nation came out of the Great Depression and began getting indoor plumbing, bathrooms, and electricity in rural houses. Before 1940, they had no electricity, just gasoline engines and kerosene lamps. Taxes in the 1930s were about \$3.50 for 40 acres. Today (2000) it's almost \$375.00. Now he rents the land to one of the few people still farming, and he lives rent-free by renting out the fields. This is a big change. He misses the camaraderie of the old days on the farm. Now he hardly knows his neighbors.



**Marjorie Martell Tutor**  
*Born: January 15, 1912*

MARGIE LIVED IN THE SAND COUNTRY until she was nine years old, when her family moved to Tripp Township in the clay country outside of Iron River. She grew up in one of the first log houses in Tripp Township. That place was called the Hubbard Farm. She remembers growing potatoes and picking blueberries in the sand country. She liked it there because she could dig in the sand and play in it. She went there frequently to visit family, pick blueberries, or catch fish. She took her own children to the sand country after she grew up. Margie lives in Superior now.

When she was a toddler, Margie got lost in the barrens one time. She remembers “Old Dad,” an older fellow who worked in the woods and stayed at her parents’ place. He’d watch the kids when her mom took lunch to her dad in the potato patch. One time she and her younger sister followed their mom, who was in the buggy. When Old Dad called, her little sister went back, but she kept going and got lost. Her parents couldn’t find her, and they cut down the hayfields looking for her. She felt bad for the animals killed by the hay mowing. Finally Old Dad called her name from the edge of the corduroy road. (The road was made from many trees lying crosswise, so you could drive across their ridges, textured like corduroy.) When Old Dad called her, Marjorie came.

Margie and her husband raised dairy cattle; Margie could milk cows faster than anyone. On a stormy morning in 1980, her husband left the house because the storm had spooked the cattle, and the bull had gone crazy. The cattle ran to the neighbor’s. Marjorie’s husband said, “Tell Otis I’ll be

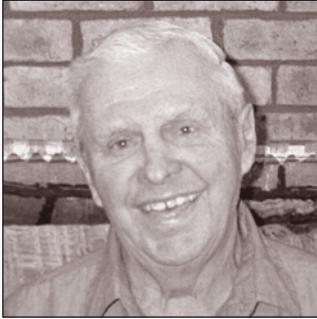


*Margie used to love picking wildflowers like these jack-in-the-pulpits. She knows it’s “illegal to pick flowers like that now.”*

ROBERT QUEEN

back at 4:00 to go fishing with him.” She told him to take the pitchfork with him. The bull stuck its horn through his leg. She saw the bull toss him up into the air. Her son picked up a peeling spud, a tool used to peel pulpwood, to chase the bull away. The accident happened at 10:00 a.m., and it was 2:00 p.m. before the coroner came. Her husband’s neck was broken in two places, and his spine had been severed. The death certificate read “possibly killed by a bull.” Farming was hard and dangerous work, even when you didn’t expect it to be.

It used to be that people could do what they wanted on their own farm, but Margie said that’s changing. You used to be able to bury your trash or garbage on your own land. Even to sell Christmas trees you have to have a permit now. She used to love picking wildflowers: lady slippers, jack-in-the-pulpits, and arbutus, the flower with the felty-looking leaf on the ground, white and pink. She knows it’s “illegal to pick flowers like that now.” She doesn’t like the lack of freedom there is now.



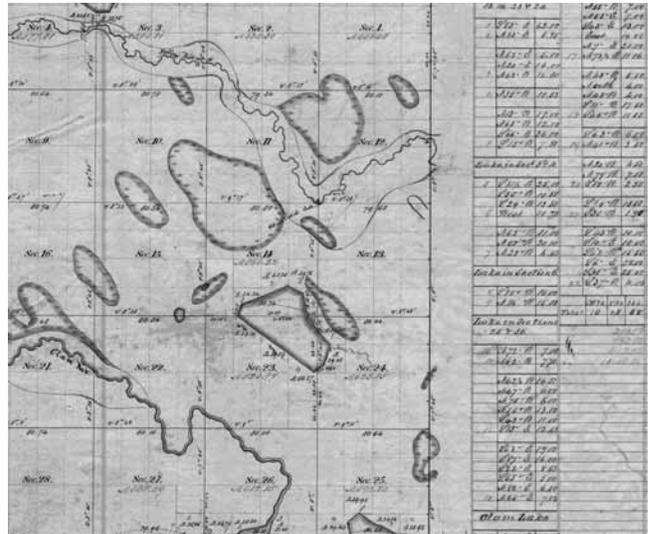
**Russell Lester Connor**  
*Born: March 1, 1923*

RUSS LIVES IN WEBSTER, WHERE HE runs a filling station that his dad started around 1940. One-eighth North American Indian (he objects to the term “Native American”), Russ is proud of his Chippewa heritage. He considers himself an American citizen and a Chippewa Indian, not part of a separate sovereign nation. Russ said he used to belong to the Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa in Minnesota. He’s related to Lafayette Connor and Gene Conner; Lafayette is his father’s first cousin.

Russ’ grandfather, William Connor, was born in an Indian wigwam on Lake Superior. There was no school there, so the family moved to Star Prairie where the kids could learn to read and write. Born into poverty in 1854, William became a surveyor and laid out the corners of Burnett County, and then, in 1875, he homesteaded in the area he’d walked through. That’s how the Connors came to be there.

Russ says Webster came to be there because of the potatoes. Around 1917–18, the old fields were potato fields. There was excellent potato farming, but it faded away because there was no knowledge of agricultural methods; they “potatoed the land to death.” They didn’t replace the nutrients with fertilizer.

When Russ was a boy, he remembers the sky was brown with dust in the summers of 1935 and ’36. There was a halo around the sun. His mom swept off the windowsills twice a day. He remembers July 1936 as the hottest time ever. The temperature in Webster was 106°, 108°, 104°, 109°. One day it was 111°, and there was no rain to speak of

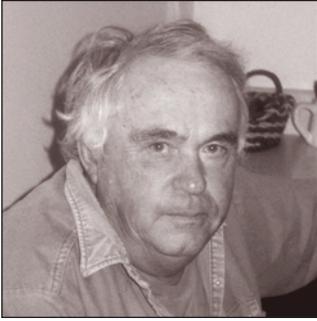


COURTESY OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF PUBLIC LANDS

*Born into poverty in 1854, William Connor became a surveyor and laid out the corners of Burnett County, and then, in 1875, he homesteaded in the area he’d walked through. That’s how the Connors came to be there.*

all summer. Sharecroppers and farmers from the Dakotas came with one cow, an old Model T, and three or four kids, trying to escape the drought there. In Burnett County you could keep a cow alive, but there was nothing but barbed wire fences in the Dakotas, and the cows would die. The terrible heat and terrible drought contributed to the hard times.

Being a boy in Webster was not half bad. There was a pickle factory there that was fascinating to a boy. There was a big room with tons of salt. Pickles were rolled outside to cure in the sun. Boys on bikes had wire pickle hooks and snatched pickles from the barrel. If you were a boy in Webster, all you needed was a bike, a homemade slingshot, a pickle hook, and a pocket full of marbles.



**Walter (Buck) Follis**  
*Born: June 6, 1939*

BUCK, A FORMER EMPLOYEE OF THE Wisconsin DNR, has lived in the sand country all of his life. He is most familiar with the northern part of the barrens. He said most of the people in the sand country when he was growing up were poor. People south of Brule came because land agents told them it was cheap land, but nothing really grew well there. If they had rain, they could grow good crops the first year, but after they'd plowed the topsoil under, there was just sand, then nothing would grow.

*...nothing really grew well.*

When he was a boy, Buck says there was more open country in the barrens than there is now. Some of the old homesteads hadn't been planted yet. Then they all got replanted to trees. When he was a kid there were still some families that lived there, though mostly they worked elsewhere. He remembers one large farm, maybe about a hundred acres, that was open when he was a kid. But that family couldn't make it. There was a potato farm too, near the town of Highland. That farm had a well and raised a lot of potatoes for a while. But, in the end, those farmers couldn't make it either.

Now nobody lives across the sands south of Brule into Barnes. The people who live in the northern part of the barrens don't live there to farm. They live there because they like to hunt and snowmobile and things like that. Sure, Buck has a garden, but he pours fertilizer on it. They didn't have commercial fertilizers in the early years.

**Ardell Lowell Anderson**  
*Born: January 22, 1935*

ARDELL WAS PART OF A GROUP discussion in Grantsburg. He said farmers in the community came together to help one another thresh, but no money changed hands. The farmers in the area owned one threshing machine. They would travel from one farm to another as the grain was ready. All the young fellows thought threshing time was great because they got to drive the neighbors' tractors as the farmers pitched the grain bundles on the wagons. In 1950, Ardell's dad bought a new M Farmall. As he was buying it, people walked by and wondered why anybody needed such a big tractor.

Ardell went on to say that his grandpa and dad owned 160 acres of canary grass meadow. The grass was tall and prolific. Every year they cut it for the young stock. His dad built a special scoot on runners. They'd load the scoot with hay using a hay loader. Then they'd pull the scoot out while a rope anchored to two tractors held the hay. This made the base for the haystack. Then they loaded a wagon with hay and pitched it on top of the base. By the time haying was done, the meadow was covered with haystacks. That's when he first started driving a tractor.

Farm families all went shopping on Saturday nights because they worked six days a week and they liked to go shopping when they were done working for the week. Ardell remembered when the stores changed their hours and shopping changed from Saturday to Friday nights. The farmers complained.



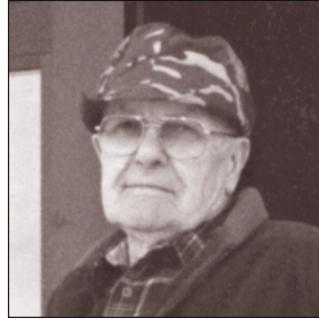
**Francis Lampella**  
*Born: December 2, 1919*

FRANCIS SPOKE ABOUT THE FINNISH settlement outside Washburn. In 1904, there were three families settled there, but more came from Minnesota in 1906 because the land was cheap. His folk settled there in 1906, and he was born in 1919. The land had already been logged over by the timber barons in the late 1800s, when they were building the cities with lumber. The first thing the Finnish settlers built was a sauna. Everybody planted an apple grove. And they planted potatoes. His dad worked in the lumber camp in winter, and he farmed in the summer.

They had a hundred sheep one time. The men sheared the sheep, and the ladies washed and carded the wool. They used a spinning wheel to make yarn, and they had spinning bees. Then they knit sweaters, stockings, mittens, and hats. The barrens just grew jack pine and oak. The sheep needed grass, and they ate the grass almost to the dirt. Nobody can farm the pure sand country, he said, not even with sheep.

For a while Francis worked on a farm in Illinois where they had 400 head of beef—he was an “Illinois cowboy.” He did a lot of fence building. “Fence building is an art,” he said. When he went in the store to buy all the wire and posts, the storekeeper asked him about working on a farm. He said, “I have a PhD—a post hole digger!” When his boss died, there went the farm.

In 1954, Francis moved back to the barrens because he wanted to live in the country. “The land hasn’t changed,” he said. Soil doesn’t change. It’s the same barrens.



**Clarence Arthur Wistrom**  
*Born: January 18, 1909*

CLARENCE GREW UP IN BARRON County near Turtle Lake where there was a hardwood forest of maple and oak. In 1938, he started working for the Conservation Department in Spooner, where he was still living at the time of the interview in July of 2000. When he first came to the sand country, it was a jack pine forest. The small farms in the sand country were having a hard time because of the condition of the soil, which wasn’t very fertile. A few years before the interview, the manager of the store in Wascott told him that about 30 years ago there were numerous farms that had cattle, but there aren’t any more in the whole county now except for a few large farms in the southeast portion. Today the main use of the land in the area is for recreation rather than farming.



*The sheep needed grass, and they ate the grass almost to the dirt. Nobody can farm the sand country, not even with sheep.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

farms

# forests



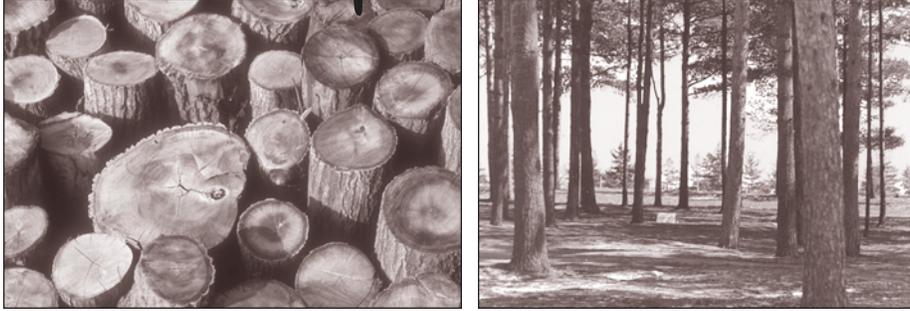
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

***Lyndon's dad worked in a lumber camp.  
In those days, being a teamster meant  
you drove a team of horses.  
Lynny worked at the sawmill  
10 hours a day, carrying lumber  
away from the mill.***

***Joe signed up for the CCC  
(Civilian Conservation Corps).  
He planted, cut, and trimmed trees.  
He carried 1,000 seedlings in a box  
and planted them in furrows  
with a "spud bar".***



# forests



LEFT: ROBERT QUEEN, RIGHT: DNR ARCHIVE

*Left: People shared their reactions to clearcutting and their love of trees. Many people in the sand country have depended on wood for income.*

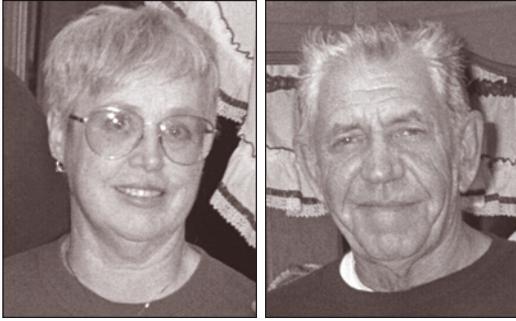
*Right: While trees and forests are ecologically and culturally important to the landscape, pine plantations are the economic spine of the region.*

Another theme that emerged from the interview data was that of forests. Some remembered their fathers working in logging camps; some did so themselves. Some planted trees professionally for the government or a company, while others did so privately, on their own land. People shared reactions to clearcutting, and people shared their love of trees.

To interpret the theme of “Forests” as broadly as possible, this chapter includes comments about playing with an old tree, cutting firewood, working in a shutter factory, driving a pulp truck, or doing anything related to forests or forest products. This chapter includes memories and opinions that help create an image of the way people have related to trees in the Northwest Sands Area.

Pine plantations are the economic spine of the region even today, and as one interviewee put it, “people have to work.” People need jobs and an income. With this in mind, it’s not so easy to say we should restore the area to more open spaces. At the same time, from an ecological view, it doesn’t always work to say that every time we cut a tree we should plant a new one in the same place. There is a need for some grassland and wetland areas that are not forested, for some of the flora and fauna that are characteristic of the barrens to thrive. From both perspectives, forests and trees are an important topic in the barrens, both historically and today.

Whether we are cutting trees or planting them, it is important to consider the desires of the people in the area. Some of the memories people shared indicate that they care very much about the land and the way it is managed.



**Sena Borup Christopherson**

*Born: November 26, 1941*

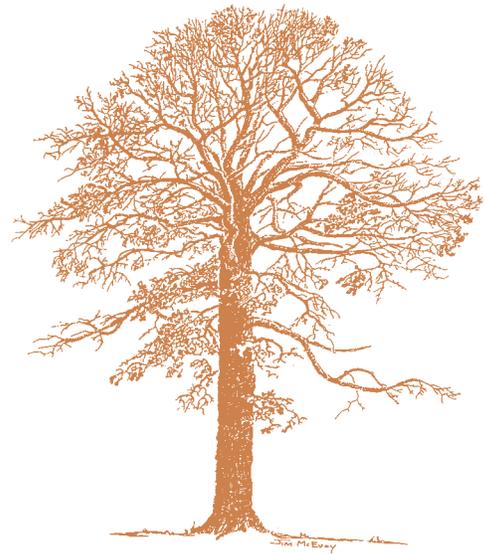
**Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**

*Born: July 11, 1934*

BUDDY SAID THE SAND COUNTRY IS “God’s Country,” but it’s getting worse and worse with more people. It’s been wild and secluded, but it’s getting less so. All the people coming to the area, he said, “are eating up what brought them here.”

Buddy said there used to be woods everywhere, with little openings that left something to the imagination. There were oak trees in the area at one time—solid oaks. They cut oaks for firewood. It takes 75–100 years to grow a sizable oak. Everything eats acorns—the oak is “the breadbasket of the woods.” He hates to see people cut oaks, especially the white oaks. By comparison, there’s no food for wildlife under the pine plantations. They girded the big oaks when they first planted pine trees. In other places, Buddy said, jack pine was natural. But now it’s a farming operation; they’re farming Norway pine for the paper mills.

Buddy and Sena think we should leave the barrens alone, quit farming it with pines. You can’t have a “natural” resource if you farm it and spray it with pesticides, they said.



*Everything eats acorns—the oak is “the breadbasket of the woods.” Buddy hates to see people cut oaks, especially the white oaks.*



**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**

*Born: December 8, 1928*

**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

DON AND LOIS TALKED ABOUT THE railroad that came through Grantsburg at one time. People shipped potatoes by rail in the 1880s. The railroad was also an important conveyor for pulpwood until the early 1950s, when the railroad ended because there was no longer enough shipping. Jack pine was cut in the barrens, Don said. Aspen wasn't cut—it just rotted in those days. Don explained that it took about seven trips to load a car with pulpwood. They had to start about 3:00 a.m. and work until 3:00 p.m., when it got hottest. They were hauling pulp! For three cents you would cut and peel an eight-foot long stick, at least three inches in diameter.

Don remembers when the barrens out Evergreen Road, around Sterling, was grassland with no trees. Around 1940, he worked in the Sterling Fire Tower. The land was open, with only little patches of trees. In 1944 or 1945, a large forest fire burned that area off. Within ten years, it was all jack pine. The fire burned away the grass and enabled the cones to seed. Don would rather the barrens were left as forest land, the way it was in the 1930s. Now it's all recreation land.

How has the landscape changed? Don said the southwestern part of the sand country has more timber than it used to. People used to burn it off. There are too many people building houses there now to burn. Initially, the government and timber companies bought people out to keep them out and made it a forest crop. The county planted trees on public land. Don hopes the barrens can be left as timber and wild land. When his father died, he sold his dad's land to the DNR.

Although he spends his winters in Alabama now, Don still appreciates the beauty of the barrens. He described one time when he cut the snowmobile engine. The sunlight was beautiful shining on the snow, pristine and white. He was in a red and white pine stand of 80-100 year old trees. "This is like heaven," he thought.

*for three cents  
you would cut and peel  
an eight-foot long stick,  
at least three inches  
in diameter.*



*Don remembers when the land was open with only little patches of trees.*

EUJINCE PADLEY



**Robert John Becker**

*Born: March 26, 1927*

A RETIRED FORESTER LIVING IN Spooner, Bob worked for the Wisconsin DNR from 1952 to 1955 and from 1957 to 1985. He always expected that a tree farm would be his retirement avocation, but now he is a freelance writer. He has written six books. He is also the author of a column called “Boot Prints,” which appears in five newspapers.

Bob summed up the history of the barrens from a forestry perspective. From 1890 to the 1920s, the original red, jack, and white pine was logged. Massive, destructive forest fires followed the logging from 1920 to the 1930s. The sand country was never intended for agriculture, so when the fertility was gone from the land and the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, people moved off their land. In natural succession, the cleared land grew into jack pine. The CCC emphasized tree planting and red pine plantations covered the landscape, with some jack pine. (The Civilian Conservation Corps [CCC] was a conservation program initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt to combat unemployment, as part of the New Deal. Between 1933 and 1942, three million young men worked to control fires, floods, and erosion across the country. They erected fire towers, built fire roads, built public parks, and planted trees.)

Now the land is going back to its original function, according to Bob: growing timber. Over the sandy soil there’s a sea of young jack pine, 25 feet tall, 4 feet in diameter. If you get the seed in the soil, it’s quite productive. Mosinee and Consolidated Paper companies own land in the barrens to grow timber for pulp, fence posts, etc.

You can run a tree planter through the soil easily because the soil is loose. When the old fields had been cleared by farmers, the stumps removed, you could take a simple tree planter through the earth. But now, when the stumps from harvested trees are still in place, they use a brush land planter. A blade on front pushes the old wood off to the side and digs wider furrows. You pull the planter with a tractor and people ride on the seats on the back of the planter. Usually they plant trees 6–7 feet apart. The wheels pack the dirt around the seedlings. There has also been some direct seeding, when they scarify the land with disks to open up the mineral soil. But it’s harder to find seeds for sale; it’s easier to go to a nursery and buy seedlings. Now they mix some species together when they plant.

Bob mentioned a neighbor who was a logger. He was raised in the Hertel area. He told Bob that there was no timber when he was a boy, just brush. When he came back from the service around 1945 or ’46, the neighbor decided to go into the timber business. He logged all the rest of his life. He said there was more timber today than when he started. The neighbor died just a couple of years ago.

“This is timber country,” Bob said. Timber and tourism are the main economic thrusts of the area. With so much timber growing, harvesting, and manufacturing, you’ll see logging trucks moving in any direction. There’s not a strong paper mill base in the sand country, but the pulpwood goes to mills in central Wisconsin, and there’s a small mill in Ladysmith and one in Superior.

*It used to be that a man who cut and piled two cords of pulpwood did an excellent job. Today about twenty cords is average with a good power saw, skidders, and self-loading trucks.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Timber and tourism are the main economic thrusts of the area. With so much timber growing, harvesting, and manufacturing, you can still see logging trucks moving in any direction.*



DNR ARCHIVE

*Here CCC men have discovered the blaze on an old witness tree that surveyors marked to record their survey data. Pine trees didn't decay as fast as other trees.*

The counties own many acres in forests, and these trees provide a source of revenue for the counties to offset the tax levies that would be assessed against the people. The counties make half to one million dollars a year, and it's getting better in terms of the quality of the timber.

In the late 1960s, this area had a high acreage of aspen about forty or fifty years old. Two thirds of the aspen was already mature or over mature, at which point it begins to die of disease, rot, and wind breakage. A report was written in 1966 describing the problem. The Northwest Regional Planning Commission gave \$500 to put on a dinner and invited all the reps from the major wood-using industry, to increase the purchase of timber from this part of the world.

Plywood is expensive; it's made from old growth trees. The technique for making wafer board was developed in Germany. Wafer board is a particle-board, a substitute for plywood. Louisiana Pacific adapted it to use aspen as the source of raw material

because we had a surplus of aspen. They ran the production line for two years then doubled it to become the largest wafer board production plant in the world. Now the counties can sell a timber species that had no market before.

Aspen is also important to deer, grouse, and songbirds. All the acres producing aspen shoots have had a great impact on wildlife: that's one of the reasons we have such a large deer herd. The marriage between timber harvest and wildlife also gave a lot of people work.

In the 1950s, mechanization began coming into the woods. People were still using horses to skid their logs, or tractors. Single axle trucks hauled three to four cords of wood. Hydraulic lifts hadn't been invented, and a lot of hand labor was involved, throwing heavy sticks of pulpwood on, then unloading it into a gondola car. After World War II, the power saw began to appear. Today everything's sophisticated. It used to be that a man who cut and piled two cords of pulpwood

"There's a limit to what Mother Nature can provide.  
Going beyond that limit is when we step into trouble."

**Robert John Becker** *(continued)*

did an excellent job. Today about twenty cords is average with good power saws, skidders, and self-loading trucks increasing productivity.

One of the things Bob liked doing in the sand country was surveying, searching for lost section corners and quarter corners to establish property lines. In the sand country, the witness trees (trees surveyors marked to record their survey data) were almost always pine. They didn't decay as fast as other trees, and you could count on finding evidence of early surveyors: square wooden stakes of cedar, jack pine, or tamarack set in the ground, inscribed, and three nearby witness trees blazed and scribed with numbers and letters. S means section; T township; R range. The surveyor would measure the distance from the tree to the corner stakes and take a bearing from that stake to the tree. All this is part of the official record of the surveyors. Sometimes a tree might have died or been burned, but pines exude pitch that seals over inscribed scars and preserves the message and the tree. Bob has a piece of an old witness tree to testify to his interest. In one case, he found the corner but couldn't find the witness trees. Someone had moved the stake about 500 feet.

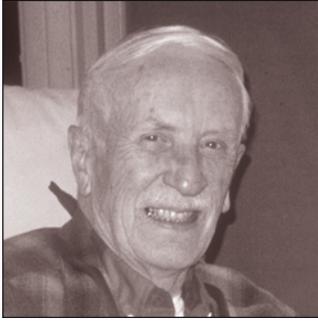
In the future, Bob would like to see the sand country undeveloped, but not unmanaged. He'd like to see a mix of old growth forest with young trees. He doesn't want more roads cut into the land or more permanent residents. What is climax forest (the kind of forest that represents the final stage of succession under existing soil and climate conditions) in the sand country? Probably scrub oak. If the land is not managed, there will be more scrub oak. Diversity is important, with both

pine and scrub oak. It is economically important to grow timber in the country, so we should be looking at a compromise between what's natural and what's beneficial to man. Both scrub oak and red pine have beauty and other assets.

Jack pine has faced tremendous disease problems. When the trees become over-mature, Mother Nature becomes the logger. To help protect against jack pine budworm, we need to manipulate the forest so the stands don't reach old age (50 years) and space the stands more.

"Look at the land first and see what it can do. If you protect the natural resources, you protect the people," Bob explained. He learned from his experience in the Menomonie forest. Surrounding it in every direction were cutover lands, hilly land that shouldn't have been cleared. In 1908, a sawmill was built there, and the Menomonie people have been supporting themselves for a hundred years with the forest. They could make more money cutting all the big timber down, but they had the forbearance to say they weren't going to take the short-term route. "There's a limit to what Mother Nature can provide. Going beyond that limit is when we step into trouble."

In northern Wisconsin in general, however, the country was cutover and burned until the north country was a wasteland. Nobody wanted the land; they were "land broke." Around 1975, we began to turn the corner: our forests started coming back. Before that they were just young trees without value to humans yet. A more conservative approach in the beginning would have left productive forest cover much sooner. Renewable resources still need protection.



**Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr.**

*Born: August 18, 1926*

BUD TALKED ABOUT HOW, IN THE EARLY years of the twentieth century, people believed the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture and the land colonizers and speculators who propagated the myth that the plow would follow the ax and that the sand country made great sites for farms. In doing so, they ravaged the soils and prairie marshes and exploited the immigrants.

The timber companies acquired tax delinquent lands cheaply and planted them. The county Forest Crop Program was a state and county collaborative program to get land back into production in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. There are still industrial forests on sandy soil.

*The timber companies acquired tax delinquent lands cheaply and planted them.*

In the 1950s, there were jack pine budworms and root weevils. The state sprayed the forests with DDT to get rid of them. Bud was really scared for the impacts on wildlife and the forest ecology. He saw the program as subsidizing the forest-using industries.

Bud thinks it goes against Nature’s way to plant extensive pine forests. “We’ll pay in forest fires, diseases, and pests,” he said. He would like to see oak savannas managed for recreation, beauty, and

wildlife. “Did you ever walk down a forest trail for a long way and then come into an opening? Isn’t it refreshing?” Bud asked, as a way of explaining his love for the prairies and open areas. But there’s not much time, because today barrens are being fractioned. Once these areas are filled with cabins and houses, the chance to hold the land as oak savanna will be gone. The barrens is a unique ecosystem for Wisconsin; we should protect and manage it for our land use heritage, for broad vistas, diversity of plants and animals. This means we have to manage it for a variety of uses—forests, prairie ecosystems, aesthetics, and wildlife. We will have to move fast to accomplish that goal.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*“Did you ever walk down a forest trail for a long way and then come into an opening? Isn’t it refreshing?” Bud asked, as a way of explaining his love for the prairies and open areas.*



**Lyndon Arthur Smith**

*Born: February 1, 1913*

LYNNY GREW UP AROUND TREGO AND Minong; he lives in Spooner now and owns some property on the Spooner side of Minong. When he was nine or ten years old, he played on that property, but the land has changed a lot. Then it was just ferns and low brush; now he has one of the best stands of oak hardwood in the country. “I love this part of the country,” Lynny said. “I don’t want to be anywhere else. I’m contented here.”

Lynny said his dad worked at a lumber camp. He drove a team of horses. In those days, that’s what a teamster was. He furnished his own hay and feed for the horses. The logging camp was a quickly constructed building, just the framework with tarpaper. Lynny’s dad was there just during the winter, and most of the logging was done during that season. He skidded the logs from the woods to the landing. They wore wool pants, shirts, and jackets to keep warm.

In 1932, Lynny worked at a sawmill for ten cents an hour for ten hours a day, so he made \$1.00 a day. The youngest in camp, he was a tail-sawyer at the mill. He carried the lumber away from the saw. He’d take the wood off the carriage and move it far enough away to make room for the rest to come off all day. A friend ran the saw: George Strenke was the sawyer. D.O. Brewer was the oldest man in camp. They called him “The Road Monkey” because he kept the ruts on the road filled and the mud drained. He spent the entire day maintaining the roads. Lynny still remembers the whole crew, but he is the only one still living.

In the lumber camps you ate a lot of dried prunes and apricots and vegetables, like carrots

and potatoes, and pork and beef, lots of stew. And doughnuts, lots of doughnuts. There were pancakes in the morning, cornmeal bread, muffins, peanut butter and jelly.

There were a lot of injuries in logging work, mostly from limbs falling from trees next to the one you were felling. One friend of Lynny’s, Monty Coons, got hit with a limb around 1938. It hit him on the shoulder. Everybody was afraid it had broken his neck. It was getting dark at the end of the day and it was snowing hard. There were close to 16 inches of snow. Lynny had a 1928 Model A pickup with a canvas top and tire chains on it. He threw a little wood in the back end of it and put some water in the radiator. Another member of the crew had a 1928 4-cylinder Chevrolet. They loaded Monty in the Chevy, and Lynny broke the trail with the Model A. It took them four or five hours to get to Minong. Those old cars had more clearance than they do today. Monty had to wear a collar for a while, but his neck wasn’t broken after all. Years later, someone murdered Monty. Lyndon doesn’t know who did that, but Monty was a good friend. He’d say: “Pull it all the way—all the teeth are paid for!” when they pulled a two-man saw together.

Looking at a photo of a clearcut, Lynny said it reminded him of the St. Croix Trail. It goes west of Minong where nobody lives to the St. Croix River. People lived there in the early 1900s. He remembers some of those people. Now there’s just an old foundation where they lived. There was a country school there. Farmers plowed a firebreak around the schoolhouse to protect it

*Lynny worries that we might run out of oak. "We don't come by it as quick as pine and popple."*



from grass fires. There's no way to make a living there now, he says, but then, with a couple of cows and a team of horses, you could almost scratch a living out of the land. The first bridge over the St. Croix River was built by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps).

Since oaks come from acorns, Lynny says "blue jays and squirrels are natural foresters." They're always dropping and hiding stuff. That's what planted the oak forest. He remembers old timers in the pulp yard saying, "Boy, oh boy, they're cutting everything off! There won't be any more pulpwood!" But he sees it go by on semis every day. Still, he worries that we might run out of oak. "We don't come by it as quick as pine and popple." (Popple is a colloquial name for aspen or poplar.) There have always been people who want to get all they can get. For example, there are not many partridge or grouse here now, but people drive all day trying to kill one. He quit hunting years ago when they got scarce. "Why kill the last one in your area?" It's the same way with timber, he says. There are people who would take it all. He did selective cutting on his property. He couldn't see clearcutting because he knows what will grow in its place.

Lynny doesn't claim to be a forester, but he says he goes by what he's seen. He loves this part of the country and doesn't want to be anywhere else.



**Raymond Bergerson**  
*Born: March 4, 1913*

RAY LIVES IN FOREST LAKE, MINNESOTA, still near the Northwest Sands Area and the St. Croix River. In 1859, he said, the St. Croix River Valley was opened up for logging. They logged off close to the river first. The logs were shipped to Stillwater, La Crosse, and St. Louis, where they were sawed into lumber. Ray's grandfather came to the area and worked in the woods in 1870. He told Ray about that beautiful timber, those big trees. He worked in the woods thirty-three years. The last few years he just sharpened axes and filed saws.

The men who worked in the woods didn't see their families from fall until spring. They usually lost their money in Stillwater saloons, so they came home broke in the end anyway. Some of the single men who worked in the logging camps in winter harvested wiregrass in May, then moved to harvest grain in the Dakotas in August.

People came to the sand country to farm because it was easy to clear the land of trees. Ray's dad grubbed his land; Ray remembers leading the horse with the stump-puller. Now we've come full circle and people are planting trees in the sand country. Ray figures it's best to plant something productive there, like evergreens, although he doesn't like trees in thick, straight rows so much. At least the trees would stabilize the land so it wouldn't erode, and they would also make it pleasant to the eye. At Grantsburg they're clearing land for sharptails, but Ray says he prefers timber. In his early twenties, Ray cut wood; he cut two acres of tamarack to make fence posts and make money. Now his son has a sawmill.



**Kay Ramel Karras**

*Born: June 19, 1918*

**Helen Rein**

*Born: October 9, 1918*

KAY LIVES IN THE TOWN OF BENNETT, near Lake Nebagamon, now. She and her friend Helen, who lives in Solon Springs, chose to be interviewed together.

Helen's dad was a logger and a farmer. In the winter, he ran a logging operation on his property with her brothers and neighbors. They were right on a river, so he floated the logs down the St. Croix. When they blew out the dam, it was the end of the logging. You couldn't float logs anymore because it was too shallow. Kay's dad spent his winters working in the logging camps and worked on the railroad and farmed the rest of the year.

Kay said she likes everything about the sand country, especially the trees. Helen said "it was home," and she couldn't get back home fast enough. There were not a lot of big trees, she reminisced, some jack pine, some aspen or popple. Kay summed it up: "There was big timber, but it all went to the loggers and the fires before we were born."



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Kay said she likes everything about the sand country, especially the trees.*

Helen's husband worked for Lucas Lumber at the lumber mill for 36 years; he was working there when they met. The women did the cooking at the lumber camps. One of the guys there drank too much. One day when he was drunk, his wife started the dryer, and he thought it was the TV—he watched the clothes go round and round. That was in the 1960s.

Kay said there used to be another lumber camp named Sauntry, with a mill west of Solon Springs. Helen pointed out that the economy of the area is still based on logging. Most people have jobs outside of town, except for waitresses, teachers, or people working at the inn.

People are no longer farming, Kay said, but they are planting trees. Big paper companies harvest trees and replant in plantations. Mosinee Paper is not as big a company here as it used to be. They harvested most of the timber previously. They had to harvest much of it because of red pine beetles killing the trees. On the barrens, all you see is new plantations, east of Gordon especially.

Helen commented that it's good the plantations are there because they bring in labor from out of town to plant trees, and they bring business to camp grounds, cabins, stores, and taverns.

One morning Helen was sitting at home in her nightgown when there was a knock at the door. It was the deputy sheriff asking to check her garage. Two tree planters had had a fight. One stabbed the other and then hid. They found him on the railroad tracks heading to Gordon.



Kay summed it up:  
"There was big timber, but  
it all went to the loggers  
and the fires  
before we were born."

Helen said the family farm is now a resort. Her dad turned the farm over to her brother, who turned it into a resort and built a cabin for her parents to live in. The old fields have grown up into jack pine and are a campground.

One day late in the fall when the ground was frozen, her dad was going to cut wood when he noticed the belt was slack on the stationary engine with high wheels. He was moving the engine to tighten the slack when his crowbar slipped, got caught in the flywheel of the engine, and hit him in the head. Her brother was right there. Farming and cutting wood are both dangerous businesses. After that, Helen's mom lived with Helen the last 13 years of her life.

For the future, Helen advised that we keep replanting the trees we take. Kay pointed out that some people don't want the trees so the prairie chickens and grouse can live there. Kay said that anyone making changes there should contact people in the area and give landowners more say in what's being changed, so it isn't just the big money interests that decide what is being done.

**Nina May Coos Wicklund**

*Born: March 3, 1919*

**Betty Irene Coos Magnusen**

*Born: October 6, 1920*

**Berdella Gail Hanson Johnson**

*Born: July 30, 1932*

BETTY AND NINA ARE SISTERS WITH the maiden name of Coos. I interviewed them together in the presence of Berdella Johnson, who was married to Glen Johnson.

Both sisters have heated their homes with wood, and both have gone out in the woods and cut wood by themselves. Regarding clearcutting, Nina said that trees get to a certain age and should be cut when there is some good to come of it.

For a time, Nina made a living with forest products, as she worked in a furniture factory in Falun in the 1960s.

Young people would walk  
for two miles to get to  
dances in the woods.

Berdella described how young people used to go to dances in the woods, near Alpha, in the early 1900s. The area was called "Two Pines". They walked for miles to get there. The dances were in the Swedish tradition: circle dances with singing. They didn't have other music besides the singing voices.



**Albert Lorin Lord**

*Born: March 24, 1931*

**Gladys Lord Sampson**

*Born: August 23, 1911*

AL AND HIS AUNT GLADYS SHARED AN interview at Provost's Restaurant in Solon Springs. A Navy veteran who served in the Korean War, Al works for the Wisconsin DNR.

Al and Gladys, who is his father's sister, are descendants of Chief Joseph Osagee of the Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa. Their ancestry is both Chippewa and European. Gladys' grandmother was Katharine Osagee, and her grandfather was Childes Lord, a man of French descent.

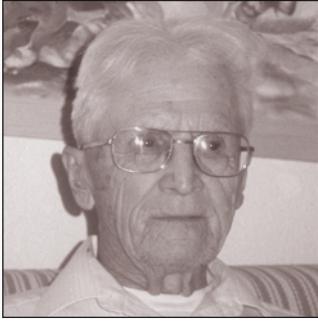
Al has Chippewa blood on both sides of his family. His mother's grandmother Lagoo was from the Lake Superior Chippewa Band; she married a White trader named Arbuckle on Madeleine Island, and the band kicked her out. Their daughter, Maggie Arbuckle, married Al's grandfather, Andy Powers. Apparently Al's grandfather got really mad when his wife and mother-in-law spoke Chippewa and he couldn't understand it. Gladys said she wished she could speak Chippewa, in keeping with her heritage.

Andy Powers was an Englishman from New Brunswick, Canada. He came here in lumber work. He put the logs in the Clam River down the St. Croix to Hudson. He rode the logs all the way. One time he fell between the logs and broke his back when they crushed against him. Others pulled him out, and he survived, but he was a hunchback after that. Al said they used to call his Grandpa Powers the "Bull of the Woods." He was known as the best fighter in camp. In the lumber camps the men wore wool long underwear under their clothes, which must have been pretty sweltering in summer. They also wore cork boots, that is

boots with corks on the soles to give them a grip on the logs they rode down river. (These are also called caulk boots. The corks or spikes are also called calks or caulks.) The nails (or spikes) on their soles chewed up the dance floor pretty bad. While the English fought with their fists, the Frenchmen and lumberjacks fought with their feet. They'd run and jump and put both feet right in the other fellow's gut. They'd walk 15 miles to another camp just to have a fight. One time the other camps got together and brought a man from Chicago to fight. When Grandpa Powers was done with him, the man was barely alive. Al's grandma took food to Grandpa while he waited, camped by the Soo Line, ready to leave for Canada if the man died. Fortunately the man survived and returned to Chicago so Andy Powers didn't have to go to Canada. Nobody could beat Grandpa Powers. Grandpa Powers was christened with the name "Bull of the Woods" later in his life. He came into a bar with two lady friends, and someone said, "Go sit down, old man!" Grandpa Powers threw him out, and the bartender proclaimed that the "Bull of the Woods" had come back!

Like some of the people, the trees around Solon Springs have been through a few things. Al remembers walking through the woods following a forest fire his dad had fought, and seeing the blackened stumps. More recently, in May 1998, 90-mile-an-hour winds ripped out the big trees in the beautiful old park there.

In a phone conversation, Al commented that he used to see only one person in the woods on occasion. Now there are people all over the place. "Soon they'll be putting in stop and go lights!"



**Lafayette Connor**

*Born: March 29, 1900*

FAYE'S DAD, WHO WAS A LOGGER AND a county surveyor, got 80 acres of beautiful pine and logged it in 1904 and 1905. Now it's hard oak, birch, brush, and popple, with little pine. Popple is the dominant tree; Faye says it grows like a weed.

Faye used to hunt in a field east of town. Somebody cut down "a popple with seeds," and now the whole field is full of popples. That's how much it grows like a weed.

His dad sold timber to the company, and they ran it down the Yellow River to Stillwater. His dad was very "Indian," Lafayette said. "He wouldn't let anyone cut trees except dying ones for wood." Faye enjoyed going up to the logging camp on their land. He had a bunk in the corner. The men came with teams of oxen or horses to work at the

logging camp. The operation lasted about two years. Maybe a half dozen men worked there with his dad, logging the Conner land, cutting all the timber by hand. You could borrow money from the Stillwater company that would later saw your timber up. They would advance the money to start a logging operation. One company usually ran the post office and appointed one person at camp to distribute the mail.

*"Maples are the most powerful tree, they can bend clear to the ground and come back up."*

Faye told about a man named Corcoran who bought pulpwood. Corcoran planted hardwoods, maples, all around his home. Another guy tried to convince him to plant trees that would last. "We want elm!" But the elm are all gone now, and Mr. Corcoran's trees are still growing. Faye planted maples all around his house. They're still there. "Maples are the most powerful tree," he said. "They can bend clear to the ground and come back up."

Since the sand country will never be a successful farm community, Faye would like to keep the trees going; plant more trees. When shown a photo of a plantation, Faye said that, before the trees were planted, this area was all scrub oak and prairie. Although he loves trees, Faye also said he does like open spaces, prairie country too.



STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

*Lumberjacks put the logs in the river. Riding them downriver was dangerous work.*



**William Soderbeck**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Alice Johnson Soderbeck**

*Born: October 6, 1914*

BILL AND ALICE SODERBECK LIVE IN Grantsburg now. Though Bill was born in Minnesota, he has really lived in the sand country area all his life. When he was young, the only roads were rut roads that cut across everybody's property to get straight to town. It was mostly jack pine in the sand country then. It was like going through a tunnel with the trees along the roadside covered with snow and hanging together. Pine timber was always green, and the wind never blew strong.

In 1922, Bill's dad built the first ferry in the area. But the lumber he used to build it had been floating in water, and it was rotting after five or six years. The ferry was a big barge-like structure, 16 feet by 36 feet. It boasted a double bottom. It was made of Washington fir, covered with creosote and pine tar. Bill's dad made paddle wheels attached to a car engine to power it. A cable ran from the apron in front to the apron in back, so when you hit shore, one end would go down to let people off, and the other end would go up. The ferry regularly hauled lumber, nice square lumber that had been sawed.

Alice said her dad used to cook in a lumber camp, in a boxcar. The men were laying railroad track into Canada. Later, her dad became a butcher. Alice remembers what the crew was like at the sawmill. She was just six then. One fellow kept scooping away from the conveyor and driving the horses by the tail. He was so drunk he had hold of the tail instead of the reins. A couple of guys who were "celebrating" broke eggs in the cook shack. Her dad wanted to fire those two guys, and the boss did to keep the cook happy. Alice said the only time her dad let her stay there when the men were there was the day he put salt in the coffeepot for April Fool's.

Alice said her mom and brother carried eggs to trade for brown sugar on a wanigan, which was a cook shack on a boat that went with the log camps.

Bill talked about cutting pulp. You got paid three cents a stick. Each stick was 100 inches long and no less than 4 inches in diameter. Pulp sticks had to lie single file down the road to dry faster. They were all peeled by hand. You had to work a long day to make \$2.

Bill and Alice both volunteered the information that they don't like clearcutting. When people cut everything off, there are no acorns left for the deer, they reasoned. When the oaks are cut, they are replaced with pines, but the deer can't live on them. There was clearcutting in Governor Knowles State Forest at the time of the interview. Bill complained that the DNR just put boundaries around the state forest without asking people. They never asked any private landowners if they wanted to be within the state forest boundary. Then visitors would go on private land without realizing it when they were in the state forest. The people who lived there would have liked to have been asked. Now they're clearcutting it, which doesn't sound right to Bill and Alice. Governor Knowles tried to preserve the sand country for hunting, fishing, and wildlife. Let the timber grow instead of cutting it down. A clearcut can look so desolate, Alice said. And after the jack pine is cut, the area is often planted in red pine, so the forest is being changed even when trees are replanted. Both Bill and Alice said we should strip cut in ten-year periods so there will always be some timber: One strip would begin to mature before the other strip would be cut.



**Lolita Spooner Taylor**  
*Born: July 19, 1908*

LOLITA, WHO HAS LIVED IN THE SAND country all her life, remembers her mother telling her that when she was a girl in the 1890s, you could walk on a cushion of pine needles under the canopy of pines and never see the sun. When Lolita herself was a girl, there were mostly scrub oaks, but hardly any pines. Now there are more pines than when she was young. The plantations that people have planted are not as charming as the original pine forests, she said. Looking at photos of the area, she said “I do love the sand country—the flowers, the old scrub oak! You can see through them so far.”

Lolita talked about the way Ojibwa people used trees to build a wigwam. First you get saplings that will bend easily. Stick them about 1½ feet apart in the ground, in a circle. Tie the saplings together with strips of the inside bark from an elm tree or tamarack root. Put bark on the outside. You can use ash or ironwood along the sides, but put birch bark on top because it sheds water well. Leave a hole in the top for the smoke to escape. Wigwams for winter were built closer together with their backs towards the storm. That way the wind packed the snow between the wigwams. People used sphagnum moss as insulation, packing it between the uprights.

When she talked about the future, Lolita said she wasn’t much for change any more. She said she doesn’t like clearcutting because it looks bad for a long time and some people aren’t replanting. She wishes they’d plant something else besides pine trees too, when they do replant.



**Dorothy Frosch**  
*Born: March 1, 1916*

DOROTHY FIRST CAME TO THE SAND country on her honeymoon in 1960. Then in 1963 she and her husband, Bill, moved from Lamont, Illinois, to Wascott, Wisconsin, to run a gas station. They built their own home, living in the basement while the house was being built. When they dug the basement, they took the trees out, which made it easier to get to the lake, but she’s planted trees since then. The game warden gave her Norway pines to plant, and she’s proud of them.

The knotty pine paneling they put in the house came from local trees, over by Highway 35. Dorothy remembers that she and Bill argued about the kitchen cabinets. She didn’t want to wait for the workmen to do them in the winter, so Bill built the kitchen cabinets and put in the electricity himself.

She doesn’t care for clearcutting or taking natural resources far away from their source. When she sees a truck go by with cut trees, she’s not happy. She understands that most of the wood is going to

Japan. She doesn’t want to give Lake Superior away to other parts of the country either, even if there is a lack of water in other places.

Dorothy enjoys standing on the porch with all the trees, feeling like she’s really in the woods. If anything makes her happy, it’s just seeing the sunshine and the trees. “I don’t know how anybody can live where there are no trees and water,” she said.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Betty Donis Lockert Hanson**

*Born: January 18, 1934*

WHEN BETTY WAS A GIRL IN THE FISH Lake area, the railroad went by their house. Her dad built a dock by the Lindspur crossing. This gave him easy access for loading pulp. They'd drop off an empty railroad car and take it along when it was full. One time, when Betty was in eighth grade, she stayed overnight with her sister. When she wanted to get home, she found the railroad fare was twelve or fifteen cents. She stopped to get her ticket to Lindspur, but the price had gone up, and she didn't have enough money. "But you have to stop there anyway because Dad has a load of pulp," she argued. The depot agent let her go on the train and later told her dad, with a chuckle, what she had said. She wishes the train were still in operation from Grantsburg to Rush City as a tourist attraction. She misses the train going past her cabin. Now the old railroad corridor has become a snowmobile trail.

There was a boxcar by the railroad tracks: "The Depot," they called it. Betty played in the depot a lot. Her sister, Muriel, would make up stories, and Betty would sit in the depot and listen for hours. When Betty was young, she would even roller skate in the boxcar.

Money was always hard to come by for Betty's family. Even though her dad worked in pulp, they couldn't afford to take paper products for granted. During canning season, the peaches came wrapped in tissue, so they recycled the soft peach papers as toilet paper in the outhouse.

When she was a teenager, Betty's boyfriend, Rodney, drove a big pulp truck. She'd listen to hear him coming in his truck, because they didn't

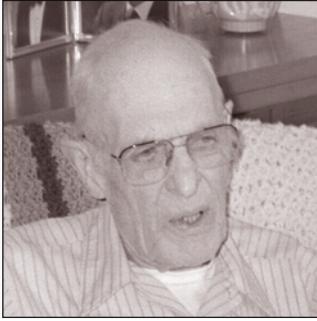
have a phone for him to call her. In the 1940s, a pulp truck was a sign of the times. His dad was ill, so Rodney helped support his mother and brother while he was going to high school. He missed a lot of school. He probably learned to drive before he had a driver's license. He still is "a trucker at heart." Betty later married that trucker, and they celebrated their 46th anniversary in 2001.

*In the 1940s, a pulp truck was a sign of the times.*

Betty worked peeling pulp one summer with her sister. Her dad paid them to do it, as he got a better price for the logs if they peeled the pulp. You scraped the logs with a big blade. It wasn't that hard, but it was dangerous. You had to pull the blade towards yourself.

Betty said she enjoys seeing the woods. She doesn't like the way they cut the pulp. "Clearcutting looks bad." She went on to say, "We used to clean up all the brush, etc. Now you can hardly walk through the woods to pick blueberries without stumbling. If you clearcut, you should plant." And they do, Betty says, but "they leave such terrible ridges. They go in with that big equipment."

It's a good thing they're planting trees, though she wishes they'd plant some crops for wildlife. She enjoys walking down to the St. Croix River with her husband and grandchildren. It is part of the Wild River forest area, and it is peaceful and untouched there.



**William R. Mason**

*Born: September 8, 1923*

BILL LOVES SAWING AND PLANING lumber. He loves the smell of it. He was still selling firewood at the time of the interview. He said he still enjoyed being in the woods, though he was not able to do much now. All that comes from when he was a kid, he explained. He had to cut firewood, and he sold wood too. That's how he got a dollar or two for spending money when he was a boy.

His friend Glen Johnson "grew up on one end of a saw." The two men got along well in the woods. They didn't have to talk much. Each knew what the other would do. There should always be two of you working in the woods, he cautioned, with the voice of experience, especially when the skidder doesn't have brakes.

One time Glen and Bill were helping a lawyer named Todd Anderson in the woods. They were interrupted in their woodcutting to let a young

couple get married. They didn't know the couple, but Glen served as "maid of honor" for the bride. The young couple had to meet the lawyer's schedule of availability to officiate at their ceremony, if they wanted to get married in a hurry, so they came to where he was working with Glen and Bill. Or maybe they just really wanted to get married in the woods.

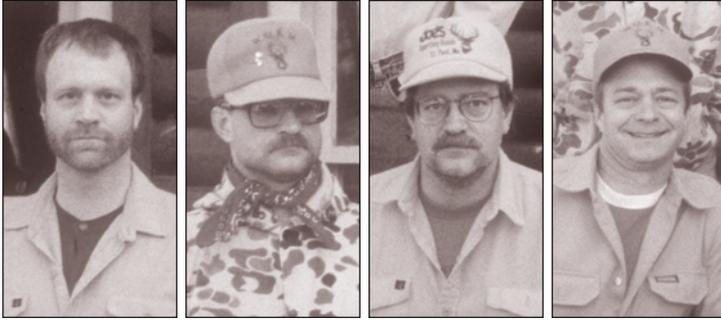
*As to clearcutting, Bill said "I don't understand it."*

Bill stated that we're subsidizing the paper companies. "It's nice the government helps maintain the land so we can help support the paper companies!" he griped. "We pay outrageous taxes." When the county or state owns the land, there are no taxes paid and we lose that revenue. He also asked why landowners don't get enough money out of the pulpwood to cover taxes. Landowners should get more money when they sell the timber; timber should be worth more.

As to clearcutting, Bill said it "looks like a mess" and "I don't understand it." They've planted in the old farm fields with timber. They've ruined a lot of trees that have ten to fifteen years of growth. They're wasting trees not mature enough for pulpwood. Bill said both that he liked the countryside better when it was open fields and farms, but he thinks the land is more suited for raising wood.



*Bill cut and sold firewood when he was a boy and at the time of the interview. He loves the smell of sawing lumber and still enjoys being in the woods.*



**Thomas Richard Johnson**

*Born: December 29, 1962*

**Andrew Paul Johnson**

*Born: December 18, 1957*

**Daniel Wayne Johnson**

*Born: September 8, 1956*

**David Eric Johnson**

*Born: November 21, 1954*

AT THEIR HUNTING CABIN OUTSIDE Grantsburg, I interviewed Andy, Tom, David, and Dan Johnson in November 1998. Sons of Glen and Berdella Johnson, they've been hunting in that area since they were in their teens. They remembered being taken out as youngsters by older fellows and sitting by the road waiting for a deer to come by, with thick forest on either side.

The biggest change they've noticed over the years has been the clearcutting of the forest by the state to reintroduce the prairie chicken. They expressed frustration about not having had any input, and Andy said it seems senseless to him, just for prairie chickens. They told me that recently the county land was clearcut where, year after year, they've hunted in the woods. The woods was "just gone," they echoed one another.

A lot more houses have gone up over the years too. There's one every few yards on private land now. That's another change.

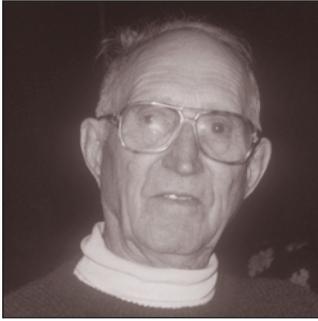
At the same time, they did say that economically, when trees get to be a certain age, they should be harvested. In the global economy we have today, jack pine pulp is valuable, while it used to be "a weed." It's just that clearcutting seems to have been done "higgledy piggledy." The Menomonie seem to have a sustainable forest; let's learn from them. An explanation of what managers are doing on public land, whether it's clearcutting, burning, or something else, would help.

Tom was the first landowner among the brothers. When he was growing up, he spent all his free time in the woods. He'd wanted his own land since he was 13. He had a vision of building a

log cabin, so he began saving his money when he was in high school. He worked mowing lawns, carrying groceries, doing odd jobs. He also worked for the DNR for a little while because he wanted to be a forester. He picked dead deer up off the roads, and in 1979–80, he fought fires. That was fun work, though he hated to see the forest burn. When he was only 14, his dad helped him look for the land, and before he was 18, he had purchased a piece in Fish Lake from the Shogrens. Tom planted seedlings on his land: white pine, red pine, and spruce he got from the DNR, and he planted high-bush cranberries for wildlife. He tried to dynamite a pond for ducks, but the hole filled up with silty sand again. Tom's thirteen and a half acre parcel was surrounded by public land. It was all forest when he bought it except for one little open space in which he planted trees and bushes. Then one year the brothers came there to hunt, only to find the public land next to theirs had been clearcut. They can still feel the disappointment they felt that day. As landowning neighbors, they felt they should have been notified about the clearcut.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Lowell Donald Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*

**Eugene Connor**

*Born: July 25, 1928*

AS A BOY, LOWELL DEVELOPED A connection to trees in both work and recreation. He loved to play among the scrub oaks and he liked to see how far he could run up one tree that grew at a 45° angle. The farther he ran up, the farther he had to jump down. At the same time, it was his chore to bring firewood to the house. He always wanted to build a conveyor from the woodpile to the house, but his parents didn't go for the idea.

*Lowell loved to play among the scrub oaks.*

For twenty years, Lowell worked at Northern Manufacturing, which was a shutter factory. Lowell cut louvers there, thousands per day, until he retired at age 62. They used ponderosa pine then. The company is still going strong. They export all over the world.

Lowell talked about cutting jack pine pulpwood in the 1930s. A good cutter could cut about 100 sticks a day of eight-foot lengths and peel the bark off, all for about \$4 a day. They worked long hours.

Lowell says he practices selective cutting rather than clearcutting on his land. He said he no longer objects to clearcutting, because the vegetation grows back so quickly. However, clearcutters do leave a mess, with stumps and boughs lying around, and they go in with machines and dig up the ground.

I INTERVIEWED GENE CONNOR AT THE Tribal Center of the St. Croix Band of Chippewa in Hertel, Wisconsin. He is the son of Lafayette Connor.

Gene told me that his grandfather, Darius, was a surveyor. He knew a lot about the businesses and houses along Highway 35. There are more people in the area now. Through the military, Gene traveled in Korea, Japan, Alaska, and Puerto Rico, but he came back home to his grandfather's farm outside of Webster, Wisconsin.

Although farming wasn't that successful, Gene remembered that some people were recruited to take out homesteads for the logging companies. They had to put up a dwelling and cultivate the land, and then the land was theirs for one or two dollars. Then the timber company cut the wood, using these people as laborers. "Indian people were good in the woods," Gene said. When the loggers moved on, the homesteaders stayed on farms with a few chickens. "What else could they do?" It was the logging that brought them there.

Gene's grandfather was a surveyor; he knew the Norwegian, German, and Swedish people who settled in the area. The men would go logging all week or month, and the women were left home doing the milking. It was poor soil, but once they were stuck, without the money to get out, they formed attachments.



**Michael Newago**

*Born: November 2, 1918*

**Kathryn Munson**

*Born: May 29, 1919*

MIKE NEWAGO WAS REMINISCING WITH Kathryn Munson. Both of them live in Bayfield now and are part of the Red Cliff tribal community.

Mike hauled a lot of pulpwood. People loaded it on trucks and used it at the paper mills. He was a “jammer.” He had a lot of strength, or, as he put it, “power to burn.” He cut the wood and dragged it; he did everything. He loaded it on boxcars. He did this kind of work his whole life.

Clearcutting is different now, Mike said. They do it with machinery. It’s not bodily work any more. Clearcutting doesn’t look very good until you get young trees growing again. But they plant them too close together. They should plant trees 12 feet apart. Kathryn said a clearcut area is not a place she’d want to go, but she does plant a lot of trees. Some of the trees she planted are 25 feet tall now.

Everybody used to go cut trees in the spring, when the bark would come off easily, Kathryn continued. They used a metal bar about 15 inches long. You’d make a slit in the bark, and it would let loose. The kids helped too.

Kathryn remembered a boy named George who, when he was about three years old, was picking hazelnuts. There was a beehive on a low limb. He was covered with thousands of bees. He never got stung, but his parents were brushing the bees off. “It’s been a long time since we’ve had any hazelnuts,” Mike and Kathryn concurred. You just can’t find any now.

There were no doctors around in the woods, though there were accidents. You had to know what plants to use to stop the bleeding. Mike’s wife, Veronica, split her knee open with an ax. She had to have stitches. Mike commented about how the way you carried an ax could be dangerous. One time a small boy split his head open. Mike said he never felt his injuries. Sometimes you’d knock down a tree and get injured, or sometimes a tree would kill people by falling on them. Sometimes someone would forget the chain saw

*Mike hauled a lot of pulpwood. He loaded it on boxcars.*

in hand and spin around fast, cutting somebody who couldn’t jump out of the way fast enough. One time the tree kicked back and caught a fellow in the stomach. He flew like a bird. Once Mike himself got pinned by a tree when it kicked back on him, but it didn’t crush him.

People always came here for firewood. This is the first year Mike and his wife Veronica bought wood. Mike remembered that he bought a wood stove from Montgomery Ward for \$18 about forty years ago. They’ve been burning wood a long time without having to buy the wood.



**Franklin Basna**

*Born: June 25, 1914*

I VISITED FRANK IN NORTHERN LIGHTS Nursing Home in Washburn, Wisconsin, in December 1998. He told me about making things from his Chippewa heritage, such as lacrosse sticks and Indian cradles, Frank has made dog sleighs and harnesses too.

In 1948, Frank cooked in a logging camp where the company wanted to see what a million-foot pile of logs on the landing looked like. He cooked for Finlanders from Houghton and Hancock, Michigan. They weren't allowed to talk Finlander there, because "Frank might not understand it. He might think you're talking about his cooking!" He cooked beef and mashed potatoes with gravy. He cooked Finlander stew. He made it once with cabbage and other vegetables, but he put dumplings in it, and the dumplings were the only thing they'd

eat. "Like a fool, I made fry bread," Frank said. They liked it and wanted it every day. They'd eat six or seven pieces. He made pies too, using a jar as a rolling pin. The Fins gave him a lot of leftover food to take home, anything that wouldn't keep. Frank remembered that the Fins would fire up the sauna when they weren't working.

*Frank used to go peel birch bark, but now you can't find big birch trees.*

Frank talked about the barrens and all the scrub oak there. How has it changed? The forests were nice when he was a boy. Now it's all cutover. He used to go peel birch bark, but now you can't find big birch trees.

How would Frank like to see the barrens in the future? He'd like to see the Civilian Conservation Corps "boys" come back and replant trees. He said that they should take the old mature stuff out of the forest because it doesn't grow anymore. Frank is concerned about all the "young people" who are walking the streets without anything to do. He suggested bringing a "bunch from the city," setting them up in tents, and putting them to work. "There are too many kids on the streets," he said.



*The Civilian Conservation Corps planted thousands of trees. Frank would like to see the CCC come back and replant trees.*



**Catherine Jones Strharsky**

*Born: October 6, 1922*

**Joseph Strharsky**

*Born: August 14, 1923*

KATIE AND JOE ARE MARRIED AND LIVE in Iron River. Katie moved to the sand country because Joe liked it. Katie said she feels like she has roots here, with family nearby and friends to call on if anything happens. She likes this much better than Chicago where she lived before.

Joe worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) when he was younger. He worked in Camp Delta in the sand country, on Bass Lake. It was a forestry camp. “We took care of the woods,” he said. “We planted, cut, and trimmed trees, all by hand, with a cross cut saw.” They used to cut bird’s-eye maple for firewood; you can’t find it now. They wore army clothing, fatigues like jeans for work. They worked six hours a day. All the men piled in a truck with a canvas top that took them to where they worked. There was a tent out there, a chow truck too. There were big aluminum cans with food in them. They ate a lot of stew, roasts, turkey, pancakes, bacon and sausage, pineapple fritters—they were well fed.

The CCC was controlled by the army. They had a captain, and the men came to revelry in the morning and stood in line, but they didn’t carry guns. When you were seventeen you could sign up in Washburn. You could sign for six months and resign or not. Joe stayed a year and a half, when he was seventeen. He stayed in the forestry camp six months. In the soil conservation camps the men “took care of parks.”

The camps had a repair shop for all the dozers, trucks, and tractors. The main one where Joe worked was in La Crosse. They wanted people with mechanical experience. He had only had

experience working on horse machinery, but he became an auto mechanic. They had a welding shop there, so he learned to weld too.

There were CCC forest camps in Clam Lake, Pigeon Lake, and other places. The corpsmen planted trees all over. They replaced trees that had been burned in forest fires. “All those huge pine trees in rows—we put them there! Red pine or Norway pine or white pine.” (Jack pine was planted before his time. He doesn’t care for jack pine because it’s scraggly, but the paper mills like jack pine for the pulp.) With machetes, the men pruned the lower branches of the trees. With big “cats,” traulers, they blazed a trail through scrub and rocks. In a straight line, with a blade, they plowed the land over, across maybe 40 acres. Then they planted trees in those furrows. The trees were about 6 inches high at planting; you could carry 1,000 trees in a box. You’d stick a “spud bar” in the ground. A “spud bar” is a piece of pipe handle made with a flat part. You’d stick it in the ground to make a wedge hole, then put the tree in the hole. Then you’d push the bar in the dirt and put the dirt over the tree roots. It was fast, but now there’s a machine that does it.

Most of the CCC “boys” came from farms and knew how to work with tools. But the city kids cut fingers and toes and got hurt splitting firewood, etc. The city kids came there during the Great Depression and then cried because they were away from home. But to him as a farm boy, working six hours a day was more like a vacation. The pay was \$30 a month. They sent \$22 of it home and gave you \$8 a month. You got room, board, and

*Life in the Civilian Conservation Corps camps included recreational activities as well as conservation work. Here the men play baseball.*



clothes, plus one set of shaving stuff. The \$8 was for cigarettes, entertainment, the “canteen”—the little store where they sold candy, etc.

There were duties assigned on a roster too. If you had K.P. (“kitchen patrol”) duty, you peeled potatoes and worked in the kitchen. There was a roster for night jobs too. You’d go through every barracks and stoke the wood stoves all night. Maybe your duties would last two weeks before they rotated. Every week, the gang would scrub the barracks. They’d pour two ten-gallon cans of water on the floor and sweep it out the door. They did this even in winter. There was a well there, and a utility bathroom with toilet and shower stalls. There was indoor plumbing with a hot water heater.

There was a recreation hall with pool and ping pong tables, and a mess hall where supper and breakfast were served. They brought lunch to you in the field. In the mess hall, eight people sat at each table. There was a cook and a busboy and a lot of food. The baker made pies and things. There were about 200 men in the camp, mostly in four barracks with about forty men each. But the officers had separate quarters and sat at a separate table where they were served. Each detail had a foreman. The truck driver just drove truck. There was a company clerk and a guy who drove to Drummond to get mail.

The men in the CCC were mischievous guys. One time the night guard brought a bunch of bread in the barracks. Lights went out at 9:00 p.m. The barrel stoves were going. The men hid the bread above the ceiling trap door. At night they made toast over the stove. Once all the bread fell down just as the captain walked in. Sometimes the men would short-

sheet or barrel someone. “Barreling” somebody meant to roll the bunk over with the sleeper in it. “Short-sheeting” was a way of folding up the bottom half of the bottom sheet to look like the top sheet on the bed. When the person got into bed in a hurry, thinking he was getting between two separate sheets, sometimes he’d tear the sheet with his feet.

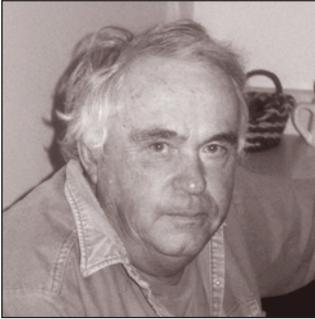
You weren’t supposed to have a car in the CCC, but some of the guys hid cars in the woods. The captain would say, “You’ve got to clean up the place where you have the cars you’re not supposed to have.”

When there were rookies, the veterans took them “snipe hunting.” They’d tell the new guys to bring their “barracks bags” (denim laundry bags) and set them to watch for snipe (“a bird,” they told them) in the woods at night. They’d tell them to “look sharp.” Then they left them there and went back to sleep. One time it backfired, and the kids made it home before the plotters. Or, if a guy was sleeping soundly, sometimes they’d lather him up with shaving cream.

Joe remembered one man who took to drinking. There was Bay Rum After Shave in the shaving kit. The guy drank it all because it had alcohol in it. He also drank vanilla extract and things like that.

Joe mentioned a nursery in Hayward. He picked acorns for them to plant oaks. They paid \$20 a bushel. They planted the acorns by hand, and they also picked spruce cones and planted spruce.

Over the years, Joe has gone to the sand country to pick berries and hunt. But now you can drive through there with the forestry roads. A lot of people come and go hiking through the barrens. They shouldn’t throw garbage there, but they do.



**Walter (Buck) Follis**

*Born: June 6, 1939*

BUCK, WHO USED TO WORK FOR THE DNR, has lived all his life in the sand country. There was more open country when he was a boy; some of the old homesteads hadn't been replanted to trees yet. "You know you're getting old when places you walked as a kid have already been logged" since then.

He said a lot of the land and homesteads burned in 1936, before he was born. The government relocated a lot of these families to better land. The CCC and WPA reforested the area after the fires. (The Works Progress Administration, like the CCC, was a federal agency spawned by the Emergency Work Progress Bill in 1933. President Roosevelt created the WPA in 1935, similar to the CCC, using local people who lived at home rather than in camps.) Then there was a budworm outbreak five to seven years before the interview. Insects damaged the trees, so they had to log a lot to make use of the wood. Much has already been replanted with red pine by Mosinee Paper, a large landowner in the barrens

Buck did logging in the 1960s and '70s. It was hard work cutting jack pine in the barrens. Five or six guys worked with one skidder in those days. One or two 40-acre lots would keep them busy all winter. Today, one 40-acre plot keeps the loggers busy about a week. In the 1960s, the loggers came home. They didn't have the camps that loggers had in earlier times, although the pulp-cutters stayed there in tarpaper shacks. The owner of the logging company would supply food and water. Most of the pulp cutters were bachelors—the last of the old loggers. Many

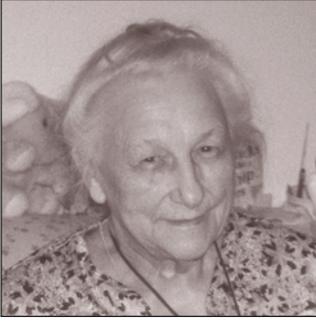
spent their wages getting drunk. You don't see the pulp-cutter shacks in the woods in the barrens any more now.

Buck said they're planting red pine where there used to be jack pine. But it tends to be barren underneath the trees. The plantations are only good for logging, as Buck sees it. We don't have the same scrub oaks we used to have. They cut it out of the plantations. Although scrub oaks are good for grouse, deer, blue jays, etc., they bear a small acorn and don't produce a full crop of acorns every year. Though Buck appreciates logging, since he's done it and many of his friends have made their living that way, he would like to see some of the country kept open. What he'd really like to see would be a mosaic of open spaces for wildlife and blocks of pine for commercial logging. "Most of us here are for logging, for timber," he said. "Most of us made a living that way."



*It was hard work cutting jack pine in the barrens.*

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN



**Marjorie Martell Tutor**

*Born: January 15, 1912*

MARGIE'S FATHER, GEORGE MARTELL, delivered water to the lumber camps in the sand country when he was 18. He was a "drey" man. A drey is a wagon on two runners, loaded with water tanks, and pulled by a horse. A generation later, Margie's sons had logging companies. They helped each other fix the skidder or whatever was needed. Margie had twelve children, and, contrary to popular images of loggers in earlier times, none of them smoke or drink.

Marjorie's husband was a carpenter in the service and he knew how to plane and cut lumber. He sawed the lumber and built their own house. He worked as a surveyor and a cruiser (one who inventories the forest, describing it and estimating the quantity of wood in the stand of trees) for Bayfield County.

Marjorie remembered the "Christmas tree boys". They would cut trees for Illinois and other states and deliver them by truck. Her acreage was covered

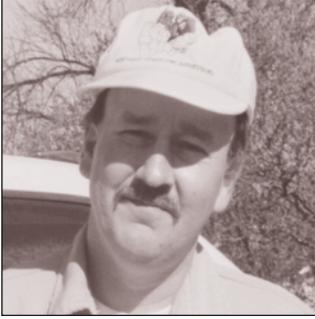
with balsam and spruce, and they took boughs for wreaths. If you cut and made them, you got paid. She never made wreaths, but she did pick boughs. The boughs were weighed and she got paid accordingly. To sell Christmas trees, you have to have a permit now.

What changes has Marjorie noticed in the landscape now? There are more pine trees. They plant them too thick in some places. How would she like to see it twenty years from now? She'd like to see tall trees. It's beautiful to drive through countryside with tall trees. She wants it to be as it was when she was a girl. It seems the trees are closer together now, and there are different kinds of trees than there used to be. She likes to see trees in straight rows, but they aren't jack pine now, and she likes to see jack pine. You've got to burn so the trees can grow, she explained. Margie used to chew sap for gum when she was a girl, and she loves the smell of the pines.



*Margie loves the smell of the pines and the beauty of the tall trees, though the trees seem closer together and are different kinds than when she was a girl.*

KATHRYN KIRK



**Philip Theodore Stromberg**

*Born: October 27, 1953*

PHIL WORKS AT THE RANGER STATION in Webster. His focus is largely on fire suppression and prevention. He pointed out that, in the early 1900s, forestry couldn't be successful unless people dealt with fire. But people didn't care about forestry then. Trees were just in the way of the plow. People eventually bought into fire protection because of the threat to homes and property.

Organized forest fire protection began in 1911, and that's when the practice of forestry began too. An emergency fire warden was appointed, and the first ranger was assigned to a large area to supervise volunteer fire wardens, who went out with a crew and got paid when they fought a fire.

The forestry mill tax began in the 1920s. Property was assessed for taxes to fund forestry and fire protection in the state of Wisconsin. Other states envy Wisconsin's mill tax because it provides a stable income. The mill tax doubled in 1931. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) "boys" erected fire towers and ranger stations, and the fire protection system began in the 1930s.

Phil wanted to convey a message to the public regarding trees. The trees that exist here naturally are here because of fire. If you take away fire as the means by which they regenerate, the alternative is commercial harvest. "Sometimes we love our trees to death," Phil said. If you don't harvest the trees, the forest won't properly regenerate. We need to manage the forest."

What about using clearcutting and prescribed burns to restore the barrens? If you create more open barrens, you're taking land out of timber production. The county is the largest landowner

in the area. The county grows timber. Can you grow more timber elsewhere? Phil said that we have to weigh the reasons for restoring the barrens landscape to pre-European settlement condition: Is it for historical understanding, appreciation, education, or spiritual value? The political or economic question is how much barrens is necessary for wildlife and how much timber do we need for wood products? The state economy is intertwined with cutting timber. In a way, the Wisconsin DNR is both a hero and a villain here because biologists want to create barrens. Mosinee Paper is a hero for creating paper and jobs, but a villain because the company precludes maintaining and restoring the barrens landscape. Smokey Bear and the forest rangers are heroes for protecting homes from fires, but villains because they prevent fires that are part of the ecosystem. It is necessary to find a balance, because all uses are valid.



*People eventually bought into fire protection because of the threat to homes and property.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Matt Welter**

*Born: May 31, 1965*

MATT IS A NATURALIST AND WRITER who came to live in Bayfield in 1992. He's worked in the Raspberry Island Light House in the Apostle Islands and as a naturalist at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland. He's written four books of poetry, and he published posthumously a poetry collection entitled *Whatever Comes Next*, written by his friend Michael Van Stappen.

His first impression of the barrens reminded him of Spokane, Washington, where he grew up: half desert and half tall pine forest, all on sandy soil. He was amazed by the first golden smell of sweet fern, and he still loves the honey-like smell that permeates your car and clothes as you drive away. How have things changed since Matt first came to the area? There's always cutting going on and there's a noticeable amount of spotted knapweed. Wherever knapweed grows, it's the only thing growing there. It reminds him of a purple snowflake along the roadsides.

There are old logging roads that parallel each other. He wonders if there's any roadless area left and why there are so many roads. When Matt first came to the barrens, he asked a forest ranger where he could hike where they wouldn't be cutting. The forest ranger said they'd be cutting everywhere. The logging trucks beat the heck out of the roads too, and the roads are getting worse.

But there is one square mile area that is being preserved by the U.S. Forest Service. The trees there are never to be cut. The uncut area is surrounded by the Moquah Wilderness Area, which is mostly managed for sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tails require open land. Matt likes to walk near

*The Moquah Wilderness Area is mostly managed for sharptails, which require open land. But the trees are never to be cut in one square mile being preserved by the US Forest Service.*



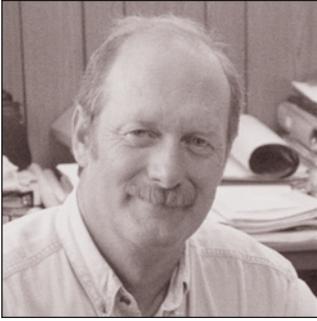
SUSAN GILCHRIST

the square mile preserve. He goes by compass or how the land flows. There's a tiny pond there that's half-filled in so it's less than a foot deep. He loves going there to look for fishing spiders and quiet. There's nobody there. He hikes through the sand cherry, leather leaf, and kinnick-kinnick—plants that get tangled up with your pants.

Matt would like to see easy access with more paved roads, but fewer back roads intersecting the barrens. He'd like more nature trails for people who want to walk. He thinks they should let some of the spontaneous burns go. After a burn there are beautiful things in dead trees. He knows where there is a red pine that was struck by lightning and fell apart like a peppermint stick that has come unwound.

This area is so rare that it would have been wonderful to have seen it before the cutover. At one time, the area was almost turned into a park. In 1905, the legislation for it to be a park didn't pass. The timber companies cut everything really fast. Over two million acres were cut in five years. Matt read this story in a 1918 almanac that described a brief history of Wisconsin. The almanac said it was a tragedy—a tragedy, in Matt's estimation, never to be repeated.

There's something about the character of the land that appeals to some people though, regardless. Matt enjoys author Frankie Larson's story of how people in the Twin Cities started calling the people in Iron River "jack pine savages," because they were a bit behind the times and because they lived in the pine barrens. But the name seems to be one the folks in Iron River have taken to. They call themselves "jack pine savages" too.



**Steven C. Coffin**

*Born: October 7, 1950*

STEVE HAS LIVED IN THE AREA SINCE 1973, when he got out of college and started looking for a job. He works as the Manager of Lands and Timber at Mosinee Paper (which merged with Wausau Paper) in Solon Springs. Steve's first impression of the area was lots of pine trees and not much aspen or hardwoods. Reforestation and planting looked like a big job. In the spring of 1999, at the time of the interview, he said over 1,800 acres and 1.6 million trees (red and jack pine) had been planted.

How has the sand country changed? People are raising more red pine on the land than there used to be here. Red pine is a more productive species for fiber and lumber and utility poles than jack pine. The goal of the company is to raise fiber for products and to make money, so they raise a lot of red pine.

In addition, the area is becoming more urbanized. More people from urban areas want to be in the sand country, and there's more building on private property.

From Steve's perspective, urban values bring conflicts. A deluge in the media convinces us that timber harvest is bad, and concern about rainforest deforestation elsewhere affects people's reaction to timber harvests here. For example, a woman called a few years back, regarding her 40-acre parcel next to Mosinee land. She asked them to leave a 200–300 foot buffer between her property and where they cut. He said no, they couldn't do that. They do notify the county of planned tree cutting activities, but not private landowners.

Another example of the clash between rural and urban values lies in the way people see wildlife.

Urban people may see deer as pets in a petting park, whereas locals see deer as nuisances or game for hunting. Those who hunt may be polarized against those who do not. Mosinee land is open for public hunting and fishing, although they don't allow camping because they lack staff to manage a campground, and they are concerned about fires.

Mosinee Paper started in the sand country in 1929. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) planted the land to jack pine in the 1930s, especially north and east of Solon Springs. The CCC really had a big impact. They turned a lot of open land into forest in a short time: thousands of acres.

Most of the property was accumulated in the mid-1940s, from tax-delinquent deeds after agriculture failed in the 1930s. Counties took the land on the tax deeds and then decided to get rid of it, mostly for about \$1.00 an acre. The land had the kind of timber the company needed for the industrial grade paper they make.

The mill at Mosinee makes paper for other customers who make a finished product. For example, 3M makes masking tape and sandpaper, while Kaiser Aluminum turns out aluminum and paper composite cans, freezer wrap with coating, and other specialty products.

It takes about 45–50 years for a stand of jack pine to be ready for harvest, so the land that was harvested in 1955 will be ready for harvest again in a few years. It will be the second managed forest in the same location.

One logger, Karl Sannwald, who lives in Minong, celebrated a real milestone. He cut the same stand of



*Logging techniques have changed. Now loggers work in a climate-controlled, sound-proof cab, out of the weather and irritating insects, and the lifting is done by hydraulics.*

jack pine twice in his life. Of course the logging techniques have changed from two-man and chain saws in the early years to mechanized lumber equipment. Back injuries and a variety of injuries from chain saws were high before mechanization, and so were insurance premiums. It was expensive to pay for workers compensation on the big logging crews. So they paid the same money to buy equipment and had equity rather than insurance. Now folks are in a climate-controlled, sound-proof cab, out of the weather and irritating insects, in a nice seat, and the lifting is done by hydraulics. The harvester sits in a lumbarized chair and runs joy sticks. The wood is harvested untouched by human hands. This is possible because the forest is renewable.

Mosinee buys wood from loggers who have bought stumpage from public agencies or private landowners. They also buy standing trees from private landowners. All Steve needed to get into the logging business was a chain saw, a pickup truck, and a skidder. In the past you'd need a crew of fifteen guys; now you need \$600,000 worth of equipment and a couple of steady employees.

The original wood went by rail to central Wisconsin. It was backbreaking labor, loading and unloading it all by hand to be hauled to the pulp mill. In the mid-1970s, the railroad was on a downslide, and freight rates were high while



*Today the wood is harvested untouched by human hands. Loading and unloading wood to be hauled to the pulp mill used to be backbreaking labor, all done by hand.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

service was low. Logging went on semis. A truck could make one round trip a day from the barrens to the mill in Mosinee. In the mid-1980s the railroad changed again. Wisconsin Central acquired track and wanted business, so they offered competitive rates. They went back to shipping timber by rail, as they still do today.

Steve said change is inevitable. It's a function of the number of people in the world. Professionals in urban areas now have money and look at "Up North" as a sanctuary from their work place. The real estate frontier has reached into the sand country. Land prices have skyrocketed since the early 1990s. People are willing to pay \$1,000 an acre for 40 acres in the middle of nowhere. In the early 1990s, it was \$200–300 an acre. There will be more land in smaller parcels, and more structures built out there. Usually the first thing to go in when people buy their "little piece of heaven" is a road and then a "No Trespassing" sign. It's harder to hunt or pick berries, and there are property rights issues.

Plantations are different now than they were twenty years ago too. Mostly they are on cutover land now, where the timber has been harvested once already. In the 1940s to the 1960s, they did machine planting on agricultural fields. Now they plant three to four years after they've harvested the

*Different landowners have different goals for their properties.*

**Steven C. Coffin** *(continued)*

timber. The site preparation is mechanical, but most of the planting is now done by hand. A disk trencher makes trenches in rows, and trees are planted in those trenches.

There are professional crews that migrate from Gulf States to Lake States. Many of these migrant workers are Hispanic. The company provides lodging in local cabins in between the floods of tourist seasons.

In the 1940s and '50s, jack pine seed sources were suspect in terms of quality. Now seed has been selected from quality seed sources. The seed is better than what the CCC planted. Mosinee established two seed orchards for jack and red pine. The cones were collected from superior stands, the seeds extracted, and the seedlings grown where they could cross-pollinate each other. The quality of the actual trees is different than it used to be.

The trees aren't planted as densely as they used to be either. They used to plant extra trees in the past because they weren't sure the trees would live in the sand, but just about all of them did live, and the plantations were too dense with trees.

Prior to European settlement, there was mostly jack pine in the area, but now the forest make-up is more diverse, with more like a 50-50 split between jack and red pine. The mixture of trees helps to protect against outbreaks of jack pine budworm or other insects destroying all the trees. It's beneficial to have as diverse a plantation as possible while still being productive. The sand limits us to jack or red pine. Mosinee has been criticized by wildlife advocates for planting so much red pine and for planting it in rows, but we haven't fully

explored the value of older red pine plantations with brush understory for wildlife habitat.

In the future, Steve would like to see the public and private sectors manage pine resources economically, without being shackled by well-meaning but ill-directed restraints. For example, there was a move to eliminate clearcutting in the Brule River State Forest. But jack pine, red pine, and aspen all have to have full sun to come back, which means the whole stand has to be cut to open the area for renewal of the resource.

Steve would like to see timber management remain important in the barrens because it's an important economic factor that allows people to earn a living. Mosinee employs people directly in the office, through major contractors, and as independent loggers. Railroad workers and truckers earn a living from the timber industry too. Logging jobs now are full-time, family-supporting jobs, whereas most jobs in the tourist industry offer only part-time, minimum wage income. Different landowners have different goals for their properties. The goal at Mosinee is to raise fiber for our mills and make money growing trees. The company is willing to cooperate with ecosystem management landscape scale plans, but they can't afford to tie up acres of their land to keep them as open barrens.

Because clearcutting is the main timber harvest method, Mosinee loggers create a lot of open space each year. But down the line, they turn the space into another timber stand. The open patches rotate. Trees are replanted every three to four years after they are cut. The open characteristics of the area exist for five to eight years after cutting.



**Alexander (Ike) Louis Gokee**

*Born: December 29, 1918*

IKE GREW UP IN RED CLIFF. HE WORKED in the woods much of his life. He “knocked down trees, cut ’em up, and hauled lumber.” He was hit over the head by a tree one time. He was cutting pulp up in the Sand River country and had four or five trees cut down already. He cut this one and was looking up when “the lights went out.” He woke up in a hazel bush. He was disoriented so that he couldn’t find the trail to get back to where the cars were, so he sat on a log and wondered what the cars were doing parked there. When he came out on the road, two people there said they were wondering why there was no noise from his cutting any more. He was bleeding from his head, but he didn’t go to the doctor; he just came home. The loggers were supposed to have hard hats: they gave them out the next day. He lay down for two weeks and then went back to work. He expected his boss to do something by way of acknowledgment that he was hurt, but he did nothing. Ike and his wife then went to Washburn to see a lawyer who was knowledgeable about workman’s compensation. The lawyer asked questions and then, afterwards, told them she was the boss’ daughter. That was in 1958. Still, Ike worked in lumber all his life. He cut pine, oak, everything. First with a one-man saw, then a bow saw. He got a power saw in the late 1940s or early ’50s. He was using a power saw when the tree hit him. Another time he was working on his power saw. He had it apart and was cleaning it up. He lit one cigarette after another until he had three cigarettes lit and hadn’t noticed. That was when he quit smoking. It was in 1964.

When asked what he likes about the sand country, Ike said “trees.” “One time they say pine trees were

thick here,” he said. Frank Bresette jumped from stump to stump from Red Cliff for two miles before he touched ground. That was around 1920. The stumps are still there. Frank was a young man, and he just wanted to see how far he could go without touching the ground. Trees are good, but only a few are left. A neighbor planted a row of pines. He dug them up in the woods and put them here. They all grew except some on the end that were run over by wagons.

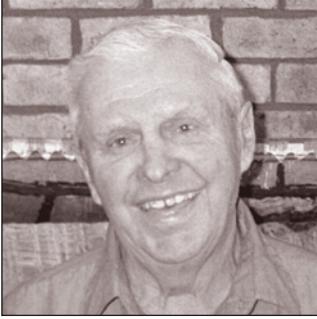
When asked what he didn’t like about the barrens, Ike responded that he dislikes it when the wind blows down trees. He spoke of a three-foot diameter tree in the cemetery and how the kids killed it. They peeled the bark off it and it died.

Ike used to go maple syruping on Red Cliff Point. There were huge, three-foot-wide maples. But a man bought the land from the county and cut the maples down. He cut the maples for firewood. There are just a few thin trees left now. Nobody goes up there any more to tap trees.



*Around 1920, a man could jump from stump to stump from Red cliff for two miles without touching the ground.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Russell Lester Connor**

*Born: March 1, 1923*

THE CONNECTION RUSS HAS TO THE forests of the sand country goes back two generations. His grandfather and great uncle, William and Darius respectively, were both surveyors who left a legacy of marvelous records describing the landscape and what trees were there.

Russ admits his pet peeve with logging operations is all the useless roads left behind after the logging operation is over. Miles and miles of these roads leave the area open for weekend campers, snowmobilers, etc. He would like to see the area restored without leaving any roads. As a filling station operator for sixty years who had to pay money to clean

*Twenty years from now,  
Russ hopes the sand country  
will remain  
relatively unchanged.*



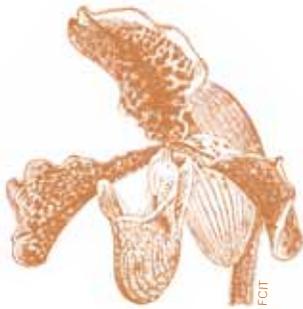
*Miles of roads left behind after a logging operation leave the area open for weekend campers, snowmobilers, and other invaders. Russ would like to see the area restored without leaving any roads.*

up the environment, he has no sympathy for loggers who should clean up after themselves too. He also doesn't like to see over-planting of red pine for quick money. There is no browse or undergrowth in a plantation, he explained. A plantation like that is a "red pine desert." He called jack pine the "Burnett County cactus." He said people should plant more jack pine.

Russ explained that the loggers ate "bean hole beans." A boat that served as a kitchen, (called the "wanigan") would paddle a day or so ahead of the logs. The cook would make plenty of beans with big kettles, big fires, and a lot of red hot coals. He'd season the beans, not salt them, in a big pot, dig a hole a couple of feet deep, attach a wire to the kettle to stick up out of the earth, fill the bottom of the hole with hot coals, then lower the pot of beans on top of the coals. He'd cover the pot with more hot coals, put earth over the coals, and pack it with the wire sticking up. The loggers would come a day later, see the wire, dig the beans up, and eat them. They called those baked beans "bean hole beans."

Russ is not thrilled with clearcutting. Russ would like to see trees treated with respect. Wood that is knocked down and not used provides humus and soil for the next generation of trees. Clearcutting is an eyesore. He wants more select cutting to maintain an aesthetic view of the land. We still need hollow trees. We need a diversity of trees. We're destroying our lady's-slippers (delicate and rare, pink, yellow, or white wild orchids native to moist, rich-soiled woodlands) with logging. They are disturbed when we clear roadsides. We are reducing diversity when rich diversity is what we need.

DNR ARCHIVE



*Lady's-slippers are a delicate and rare wild orchid. Clearing roads and logging can disturb them and reduce the diversity of the area.*



**Judith Pratt-Shelley**  
*Born: January 24, 1959*

Twenty years from now, Russ hopes the sand country will remain relatively unchanged. He likes the fact that a lot of the area is public land. "Democracy is hard on the environment," he said. Private landowners do things on their own. About 105,000 acres of forest cropland belongs to the public in the sand country. "I'm the public. I should have some say in it."

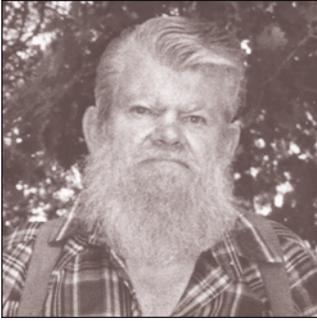
Russ told about some magnificent timber that shouldn't have been logged. On a ridge left by the glacier, there were white oaks too big to reach around, with little underbrush. The acorns were the size of a walnut. The branches spread 30–40 feet wide. You could hit a golf ball between the trunks of the trees, they were so well spaced. It was like a magnificent park—that place was a sight to see! Then one fall that area was sold to loggers: the Hill brothers, from Danbury. They paid for it and logged it. Most of the logs were hollow and were piled uselessly. The food for wildlife was gone forever. It's a tangle of wild cucumber and blackberry there now, with just a little bit of oak left. Loggers haven't done anything there since then, but Russ says it's ruined anyway.

Russ complained that we send unqualified men out into the woods to log. You can't cut with chain saws after spring, because of the danger of fire, but loggers still do it. There are men with low qualifications doing this delicate thing.

JUDY SPOKE FROM HER OFFICE AT Tribal Headquarters in Red Cliff. She grew up in "Happy Hollow," near Bayfield. She doesn't like all the road development in the area, and she's noticing more clearcuts, which she hates to see. "Trees are being cut down," she said. "We're beginning to have input, but it seems real drastic when there's a big clearcut." We need to consider the whole forest. We need more consideration for wildlife and what happens to them and rare plant species. Note traditionally important food and medicinal plants like sage and sweetgrass and don't just consider the board feet of lumber that can come from trees. Judy doesn't like to see aspen replace pines that are cut, although she acknowledges that clearcuts and aspen are useful for deer management.

She likes to gather juneberries and hazel nuts. Princess pine is almost viney and she gathers that around Christmas. Some people gather boughs or make wreaths.

Judy's main message is that people don't really own the land. We should manage the resource for at least seven generations. Gather the resources of the earth, yes, but don't poison the earth. Limit the amount of roads and develop certain spots for ATV and RVs. All life has a right to have their home free of external waste, including wildlife in the forest—that's their home. Recognize treaty rights and include input from the tribes. Hire a few more mothers to manage the land: let them add nurturing.



**Milton Herman Aronson**

*Born: December 29, 1939*

MILT WAS FIFTEEN WHEN HE FIRST CAME to live in the Northwest Sands Area. His dad was in the Service, so the family moved around a lot, but “my heart felt like it belonged here,” he said. One of the reasons he’s so attached to the sand country is because that’s where he met his wife, Eleanor.

Milt and Eleanor moved to Kansas when they got married, but they only stayed there about six months. They didn’t like it because there were no trees there, just dust storms, and they were too far away from their families. They also lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, for a while. Milt and Eleanor live in a house in the woods near Grantsburg. It’s “the place to be,” Milt said.

Among the work that Milt did in the sand country was cutting a lot of jack pine for pulpwood. He started at age eleven, before he actually moved here. His dad used to keep him out of school at one time, up by Itasca, Minnesota, Paul Bunyan country. When he was fifteen, he started cutting pulpwood in the Wisconsin barrens with a friend. His first job here was trimming limbs off trees using bow saws and double blade axes. The guys he worked for said, “Milt can go and go and doesn’t stop.” Then he started cutting his own trees. He used a different ax for the summer than for winter. In summer a thin blade will cut like a razor, but in winter, it will break, so you need a blunt, not-so-thin blade. It’s a lot faster to use the summer ax in summer. He’d carry a little 6-12 mosquito repellent bottle filled with kerosene to wipe the blade down with his fingers. That got rid of the sap on the blade so it wouldn’t stick. He kept the cap on that little bottle tight.

One of the first changes he noticed since he first started cutting wood was that the size of the wood was getting smaller all the time. Guys had small caterpillars to pull the trees around. Then a modern tree skidder could pull twelve to fifteen trees at a time and at a good clip too! Milt used horses at first. He pulled cable out and hooked trees with the skidder, pulled them into the landing, and dropped them off. Other machines called “slashers” cut the tree into lengths. You’d load from the slasher or make a pile. As he got older, modern machinery came along. Self-propelled processors have been around since the early 1990s. Milt has run one of these processors. He’s cut mostly popple logs with it. When he was younger, he worked for Otis Rand out of Webster. Later he worked for Otis’ son when the company, Rand Forest Products, went the modern way.

More recently, it bothered him to see the Wisconsin DNR cut the trees right across from his house. Milt likes to have the trees above the top of the road so you drive through a tunnel of tree branches. For a guy who cuts trees, he said, he’d still like to see the trees. He commented that the trees are smaller and scrubbier. He liked the warm feeling of being in the woods. When you open up the land, it gets a little more barren. Now Minnesota people come through and “ooh” and “ah” about how nice and beautiful it is.

Milt said that in the sand country it’s easy to take a tree out of the ground. Sand is easy to work with. You can pull out a tree with a tractor without it costing an arm and a leg, though it may be hard to have a nice yard.



**Eleanor  
Bistram Aronson**  
*Born: November 10, 1942*

ELEANOR'S GRANDFATHER WORKED just south of Superior, in a lumber camp. He would walk to work, work all week, then walk home for the weekend. It was 50–60 miles. In winter, he went on skis.

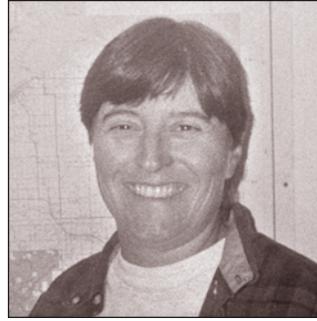
For twenty-eight years, Eleanor worked for Northern Manufacturing. They made wooden shutters and doors. The wood was shipped in from far away. It used to be a furniture factory when Eleanor first worked there in the early 1970s. Around 1990, they sold the furniture off so they just make shutters now.

Eleanor likes the peace and quiet and the whip-poor-wills in the barrens. She loves oak and pine trees. It used to be, she explained, that the trees grew close enough to the roads to make a canopy over you. There are not many of those trees left any more. The DNR cuts them back. "I'm kind of a nut for trees," Eleanor said. "I like the trees."

*The land has changed.*



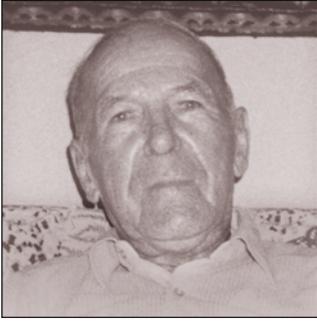
*Joyce would like to see a balance between open and forested country, with fire used as a management tool.*



**Joyce Zifco**  
*Born: October 27, 1953*

JOYCE WAS RAISED ON A FARM FIVE miles southwest of Ashland. Her dad had a construction company and did contracting work for the Forest Service. When she was 23 or 24, her dad called and asked if she would be part of his big dream: taking the whole family on a trip to Alaska. At the time, she was working in the accounting department of a bank. Quitting her job to go with her family to Alaska was a big decision, one that changed her life. Alaska inspired her. After the trip, she didn't want to work inside, so she went back to school to study natural resources management. She took a job with the Bayfield County Recreation Department, then worked for the Wisconsin DNR in Brule. When she was hired by the Forest Service, her dad was really excited. The Forest Service numbered roads were like a special language between her and her dad. Today, Joyce works as a firefighter and ignition specialist at the Washburn Ranger Station.

Over the years, Joyce has worked with folks on both sides of the spectrum: sharptail purists who want every tree cut down so no hawk can sit there and pick off a sharptail, and those who want to plant the whole area in trees. Joyce remembers the barrens when it was wide open. There was this vast opening, like the plains out west. It seemed special. The land has changed since the 1930s because the CCC planted it, but there are still chunks of open land. Joyce would like to see a balance between open and forested country, using fire as a tool because it has historically been part of the natural cycle of the area. She'd like to see both mature and immature stands of trees, amidst some rolling hills so people say "Oh, Wisconsin's not flat!"



**Francis Lampella**

*Born: December 2, 1919*

FRANCIS' FAMILY CAME TO THE FINNISH settlement near Washburn in 1906. One of the first things they did was plant a grove of apple trees. Like the early Finnish settlers, Francis has nurtured apple trees. He now sells apples for extra cash. He gave me some yellow transparency apples from his orchard. In this way he still works with trees.

The area around Washburn had been logged over by the timber barons in the late 1800s. The nation's cities were built with lumber. The Washburn area used to be virgin pine timber. When they cut it, the huge trees never came back. They planted it back in jack pine in 1928,

and now that's already been logged off. The timber barrens left beautiful logs wasting. You don't do that now. Now you haul all the branches out; you don't waste anything.

Although the lumber camps were before Francis' time, his dad worked in them. He worked in lumber camps in the winter and farmed in the summer. He told Francis that there were lice everywhere in the camps. There were so many sawmills; there was a big one in Washburn. A train went past the house and into the woods, where they loaded logs. Logs were floated from Canada to Ashland too. They tied logs together like a raft and called it a "log boom."

Francis started cutting wood in the 1940s. He did suffer a couple of logging accidents. One third of his left index finger is gone. In the 1950s, he was cutting and selling eight-foot pulp-sized logs. Everything was hydraulic. He loaded pulp with a skid loader. But something broke in the transmission—the bucket broke on the ground. Francis held the shaft in the transmission, and when he started the controls, the machine pulled his hand in, and he lost part of his finger. Another time he hit his left foot with a short handle ax. He poured the blood out of his shoe. His second toe was cut. The doctor put him to sleep and stitched it up. A year later, he started to get a red lump there. He went to the doctor and watched the whole process as the doctor numbed it with a needle and pulled a thread out. The doctor had thought he'd put dissolvable stitches in there, but he hadn't. It was



*Like the early Finnish settlers, Francis has nurtured apple trees. He now sells apples for extra cash.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

Why buy land just to look at it?  
"You can't farm the barrens. . . .  
I would just plant trees."

in the 1960s when he was logging and cut his foot. He never did hurt himself with a power saw. Francis used a spud bar to plant trees in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) in 1937. He planted a lot of trees by Brule. Mostly he planted small trees. Now he sees clearcutting and hopes they will reseed. "I don't know why they don't replant," he said. They clearcut, bulldoze, and just hope it will reseed on its own. If the Wisconsin DNR buys land here, that's all right. They'll selectively cut, just the big trees. The forests need to be thinned out. But he hopes people will go back to tree planting: raise those seedlings and plant them in the spring. He doesn't understand clearcutting. In the old country, when you took one tree out, you put another in its place. When they logged the jack pine, the county planted trees. Francis did that in 1948. Even kids in 4-H planted trees. They planted white spruce because white spruce is the top of the line wood for paper mills.

Francis ran a sawmill for a hobby in the 1940s. For a while he worked making veneer in Ashland. For a while he worked for the Nekoosa Company. He logged on their land in Bayfield County. He loaded the train gondolas by hand, put an ax in and pulled them, 20 cords to a car load. He stood the logs on end, eight feet high. They took the logs to the paper mills. He worked nine years for them.

In 1957, Francis paid \$700 for 120 acres. He never cut the timber. Years later, a couple of guys from the city wanted to buy 40 acres of firewood. He sold the land for \$12,000.

The barrens land won't grow anything much except jack pine, and that will keep on growing. That aspect of the barrens hasn't changed because the soil hasn't changed. It does no good to leave it sitting there as vacant land. You ought to plant it to something. Why buy land just to look at it? "You can't farm the barrens. . . I would just plant trees." But retirees are coming to the area now, and tourists have hit the area hard. In that sense things have changed quite a bit.



GERALD BARTELT



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Francis doesn't understand clearcutting (top) but he thinks the forest needs to be thinned by selective cutting (bottom).*



**Nora Searles**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Harold Searles**

*Born: September 13, 1911*

**Ardell Lowell Anderson**

*Born: January 22, 1935*

**Floyd Lang**

*Born: April 5, 1914*

HAROLD AND HIS WIFE NORA USED TO run a cranberry marsh. Harold's grandfather started the marsh and put in dykes in 1910. Harold was born and raised in Wisconsin Rapids, but he moved to Hertel to work in the marsh in 1929. Now Harold and Nora's daughter, Linda Root, runs the cranberry business.

When asked how the landscape has changed over the years, Harold and Nora spoke of better roads, more people moving in, more and faster traffic on little country roads. That's what bothers them. However, Harold said, the timber's better. The timber's been cared for: it's been cut and now there are new plantings. Mosinee (a paper company in the area) took good care of the timber. There are still some big oaks here. One of the largest white oaks is still here.

Nora recalled how her grandfather came from Ohio in a wagon pulled by oxen, looking for farmland. There was cheap land in northern Wisconsin. Every 160 acres there were little farms. Now those farms are planted to timber. She guesses that's better than just leaving the fields idle. Now a lot of the people who come here are just weekend people from the cities.

Although they don't have open spaces in Hertel as they do in Crex Meadows, Nora likes the open spaces. She and Harold wouldn't want everything planted to trees. They just don't know who could do anything with these places except plant trees. Nora referred to her cousins from South Dakota—they weren't happy here because they couldn't see for miles the way they could in the Dakotas. In the marsh, it's the willow brush seeding into it that's a problem.

IN A GROUP DISCUSSION IN Grantsburg, Floyd and Ardell talked about oak. Floyd warned that the oak is going to be gone. People are planting pines when they should be planting oak. Apparently The Nature Conservancy is studying planting oak. Oaks are slow growing. People want oak trim for all the houses they are building. The oak is almost gone. Ardell explained that people won't buy black oak because the tree grows around dead knots and the lumber has holes in it. It makes good firewood, but people won't buy it. With red oak, on the other hand, the branches keep growing. Red oak requires heavier soil. "That's good quality wood."

Ardell said he's planted a lot of Norway pine. Jack pine is stronger for lumber. White pine is softer. You can make a thumbnail mark in white pine, but not in jack pine. Floyd knew a man who wore out a pair of mittens every day, just handling jack pine wood in winter; it was that rough.



*Jack pine is a strong wood for lumber. This tree, located in Douglas County, was the tallest jack pine known when it was photographed in 1962.*

STABER W. REESE

# Berries



ROBERT QUEEN

*The ground used to be blue with berries,  
but you can't find them like that now.  
Bob goes to the berry farm where they  
are thick and easy to pick, and you don't  
have to swat as many deer flies.*

*When Judy was a girl they'd go up a fire  
lane that would be blue with berries.  
They would stop the car, jump out,  
pick and eat, pick and eat blueberries  
and more blueberries. It was the  
experience of doing something outside  
together as a family that kept their  
bond with the earth.*

Berries



# Berries



ROBERT QUEEN

*For some, the blueberry could be considered a symbol of survival in the barrens, for people have depended upon it when times were hard.*

**B**ecause so many of the people interviewed in the Northwest Sands Area mentioned berries, the theme emerged from the data as characteristic of the area. Most of the time, mention of berries was fleeting, but perhaps the gathering together of those brief encounters with the theme will help to paint a fuller and more colorful picture of the barrens and the experiences of the people connected to the region. People talked about picking berries, encountering wildlife while picking berries, canning or selling berries, eating berries when that's almost all there was to eat, and burning the land for improved berry growth. They indicated changes evident in the way berries are harvested, in the berry patches, or in the taste of the berries since their early memories. There are blackberries in the area and cranberry bogs are a commercial business there, but it is first and foremost the blueberry that has colored the ground in summers past and still tints memories of the barrens. For some, the blueberry could be considered a symbol of survival in the barrens, for people have depended upon it when times have been hard.

## Berries



**James Orvin Evrard**  
*Born: July 19, 1942*

JIM GREW UP IN OCONTO FALLS, ON the edge of a sand barrens in northeast Wisconsin. He visited Crex Meadows Wildlife Area near Grantsburg for the first time in 1970. He eventually moved to Grantsburg, where he worked for the Wisconsin DNR in wildlife management and research. He worked at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area from 1973 to 1979 and from 1992 until he retired in 2001.

Jim talked about some of the history of the barrens before his time and spoke of the journal of Michael Curot (*A Wisconsin Fur-Trader's Journal, 1803-1804*). During the period covered by the journal, the Chippewa in Wisconsin obtained guns from trading with European settlers and therefore were able to push the Sioux west.

More recently, tribal use of the barrens has been for commercial blueberry picking, Jim explained. But now, with casinos in Danbury and other places, most Chippewa people don't need to pick and sell berries. In the 1930s the Indian kids were put in White schools, and the traditional cycle of oral history was broken, but Jim is sure some Chippewa people still remember berry picking when it was a community activity vital to their well being.



**Robert John Becker**  
*Born: March 26, 1927*

BOB IS A FREELANCE WRITER WHO writes human interest and outdoor life stories. He recalled writing about a man who bought blueberries from the Chippewa, then resold them. Bob also mentioned that in the 1920s and '30s, game and fish were a big part of the diet, but in the summertime, it was berries.

*The ground used to be just "blue with berries." You can't find them like that now unless there's a disturbance.*

Now Bob goes to the berry farms where the berries are thick and easy to get. He no longer picks them in the wild. He used to pick wild blueberries and some blackberries, but the crop is undependable. Guy Johnson, who settled in the Webb Lake area, told Bob that the ground used to be just "blue with berries." You can't find them like that now unless there's a disturbance. You pick on the edge of furrows now or you go to the berry farms where you don't have to swat as many deer flies.

*Bob used to pick blueberries and some blackberries.*

# Berries



## Catherine Jones Strharsky

*Born: October 6, 1922*

## Joseph Strharsky

*Born: August 14, 1923*

AS KIDS, BOTH JOE AND KATIE PICKED a lot of blueberries. Katie canned at least 100 quarts of blueberries. Sometimes for her, a quart of blueberries and a loaf of bread served as her family's supper in the Great Depression. Sometimes they'd sneak into the milk house and put a little cream in too.

One thing that's changed, Joe said, is that there used to be fires during the drought of the 1920s and 1930s. Those fires sweetened the soil with potash, and that meant more blueberries.

*The fires sweetened the soil with potash, and that meant more blueberries.*

"It's nice," Katie says now, "that you can go pick blueberries and not have to pick them or sell them." The blueberries are close, just across the road. Joe pointed out that there are juneberries there too. You can make pies with them, eat them, or make jam. Juneberries are a little bigger than blueberries, and a little more purple. Bears eat them.

When they went blueberrying, Katie said they piled as many kids in the car as they could, and dad drove. They brought their lunch and water. It was fun because you never got to go anywhere in those days. They never lost a kid or anything



*Katie says the sand country is also good for growing strawberries.*

on a berry-picking expedition. Some people pitched a tent and camped there, but Katie's family needed to get home to milk the cows. The berries were a source of income. A store in Ino bought them and shipped them on the train. "The work started," Katie said, "when we got home. Then we had to clean 'em and make pies, etc." Katie still likes blueberries plain.

"This year," Joe said (1998, the year of the interview), "they just got ripe and were gone." It must have been the lack of rain or something, he figured. Years ago, he doesn't think the berries ripened as early as they do now. Now they ripen at the end of June, whereas it used to be a month later.

"One good thing about the sand country," said Katie, "you can grow good strawberries."



## **Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**

*Born: December 8, 1928*

## **Donald Lee Shogren**

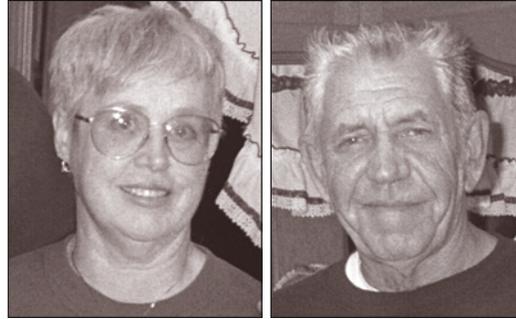
*Born: November 13, 1919*

LOIS SAID THAT WHEN SHE WAS growing up, she picked blueberries and chokeberries by the bucket. When the Crex Carpet Company was in operation, she said, they burned the marsh in the spring. The burning made good blueberry country.

*That train was called the "Blueberry Special".*

Don said there were wild cranberries out at Fish Lake in his youth. There was a cranberry bog where alder brush grows now. The bog was close to the land, and there were more trees than now. He would walk out there and pick wash-tubs of cranberries, using a hand scooper with slots in it, on a long handle. Don usually didn't sell the cranberries he picked, unless maybe it was for sauce. There was a commercial cranberry bog in operation on the south shore of Fish Lake until about the 1920s. All the cranberries died out in the drought years of the '20s and '30s and never did grow back.

When he picked blueberries, however, Don sold pails of them to the stores. When the train ran to Rush City, Minnesota, he also sold his berries there and made five cents per pound more. That train was called the "Blueberry Special".



## **Sena Borup Christopherson**

*Born: November 26, 1941*

## **Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**

*Born: July 11, 1934*

BUDDY AND HIS WIFE, SENA, WHO LIVE in the Grantsburg area, said Stevenson Meadows grew cranberries from around 1900 to sometime in the 1920s. They "shipped 'em out by barrel on the train." The train went from Grantsburg to Rush City, Minnesota. Sena picked her own cranberries every fall. "The kids fought more than they actually picked," she said. Then they spread the berries out, "cooked 'em and canned 'em."



*There was a commercial cranberry bog in operation on the south shore of Fish Lake until about the 1920s.*

## Berries



### Albert Lorin Lord

*Born: March 24, 1931*

### Gladys Lord Sampson

*Born: August 23, 1911*

AL AND HIS AUNT GLADYS, BOTH Chippewa with some French ancestry, shared an interview at Prevost's Restaurant in Solon Springs. Both Al and Gladys used to pick blueberries. Al said that, in the summer, "the Indians were picking blueberries by the wagon load, and they would ship 'em to Minneapolis on the railroad." When they were done, they burned the blueberry patch for next year. Now it's woods; you couldn't burn it now.

Al remembers picking blueberries in the bird sanctuary (Douglas County Wildlife Management Area). The berries were hiding under the ferns. His dog, Rags, ate lots. Al's legs got all blue. Al remembers that when he was a kid during the Great Depression, he picked a whole washtub full of blueberries here. But they couldn't sell them so "Grandma canned 'em."

Al's grandmother used to put up about 200 quarts of blueberries in the summer. They sold them for twenty-five cents for two quarts. Now it's ninety-eight cents for a pint, and they're commercial berries. It's not the same berry.

Al said he used to pick sand cherries too. You can make jelly out of sand cherries, but you have to add apples. Sand cherries are black; they look a lot like ripe olives.



### Kay Ramel Karras

*Born: June 19, 1918*

### Helen Rein

*Born: October 9, 1918*

TWO FRIENDS, HELEN AND KAY, SHARED an interview and talked about things they did as children.

Helen said she worked picking strawberries and blueberries, as well as trapping gophers for five cents each. She picked lots of wild strawberries. Her mom made jam and strawberry shortcake. In her family they canned about 200 quarts of blueberries each summer. All in all, they canned about a thousand quarts of food each year.

Kay said that this is the first year she didn't go blueberry picking. There weren't many berries. She acknowledged that burning is good for the blueberries. "It takes two years for the blueberries to come back," she said, after they burn the young trees.



*People picked blueberries by the wagonload and shipped them to Minneapolis on the train. When they were done they burned the blueberry patch for the next year.*

## Berries



**Dorothy Frosch**

*Born: March 1, 1916*

**Terry Robert Jordan**

*Born: July 14, 1952*



**Lowell Donald Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*

DOROTHY REMEMBERED A TIME SHE got lost and was glad to find a cranberry bog. She was driving with her friend Kay, showing her stuff, when they got lost and then ran out of gas. Her grandson was in the car too. They heard someone logging so they walked over there. The logger guided them to a cranberry bog where there was a phone. They called Kay's husband to come rescue them. Lewis was the name of the people who had the cranberry bog near Nancy Lake. In the barn, they tumbled and washed the cranberries. As she remembered it, "Eat More" may have been the name of the company that operated in the 1960s. "Everybody loves cranberries. We go to the bog and buy them and freeze them and put cranberries in everything."

Terry Jordan, an Oneida man who works for the Wisconsin DNR in Spooner and was present during the interview, added that there are cranberry bogs in Gordon and Hayward, as well as some other places now. Expanding cranberry companies tear out the original bog and put in cranberry pits lined with sand.

LOWELL WORKED AS A FARMER MOST of his life. Today Lowell remains active in the local historical society and his church. He cooks too. He's not a hunter; he tried it but didn't like it. He likes to look for birds along the corridors where the railroad used to go. The railroad was abandoned in 1951.

Lowell recognizes this as blueberry country. He's canned plenty of blueberries. Well, his mother did the actual canning. She used a wood-burning cook stove. But now, he says, you don't get many blueberries, barely enough for a pie. The area needs to be burned now and then, for the good of the blueberries, but the DNR doesn't allow that, he said.

*The area needs to be burned for the good of the blueberries.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*There are several cranberry bogs in the region. Expanding cranberry companies tear out the original bog and put in cranberry pits lined with sand.*

# Berries



**Betty Donis  
Lockert Hanson**  
*Born: January 18, 1934*

BETTY GREW UP IN THE FISH LAKE area, same as her dad. When her dad was a boy, he and his brother picked blueberries to sell. They would catch the Northern Pacific Railroad train that traveled across their land, and the train crew would buy all the berries they had picked. They didn't have to travel to Grantsburg to sell them.

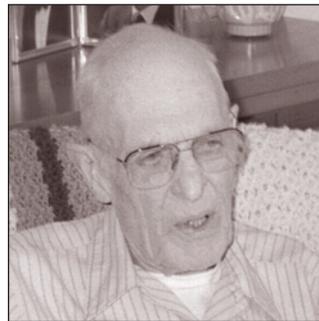
When berry-picking was at peak season, the train would carry pickers from Rush City, Minnesota, to the Fish Lake area for good picking. The train, which ran right past Betty's house, was nicknamed "The Blueberry Special". Now Betty has a hunting cabin she named "Blueberry Special Junction". The train is gone, and Betty misses it.

Betty's family picked a lot of berries for their own use. With a family of five children, they never sold berries. Her mother often canned 100 quarts of blueberry sauce. Betty had tonsillitis a lot as a child, and even if she couldn't eat anything else, blueberry sauce always went down easily.



**Lyndon Arthur Smith**  
*Born: February 1, 1913*

LYNNY HAS HEARD PEOPLE SAY, "WE don't have any blueberries any more because we don't have any forest fires." But he doesn't want forest fires on his land. Lynny points out that years ago there were so many blueberries because there was so much open country. Some people wanted blueberries for a cash crop. They hauled the berries to the station with a horse, by the crate! But some of the best blueberry picking on his land is about 50 yards from the house, where there's never been a fire, as far as he knows.



**William R. Mason**  
*Born: September 8, 1923*

EVERY YEAR BILL WENT WITH HIS family to pick blueberries. Sometimes he went with his folks to pick berries in the pasture. During the dry Great Depression years, there were a lot of fires, and Bill noticed that burning helped the blueberries. But Bill did not care for all the biting insects that sometimes thrived in the sand country. Some years the mosquitoes were so bad you couldn't even pick the berries. They used a yellow oil, Citronella, to keep the mosquitoes away.



*"Everybody loves cranberries."*





**Nina May Coos Wicklund**

*Born: March 3, 1919*

**Betty Irene Coos Magnuson**

*Born: October 6, 1920*

SISTERS NINA AND BETTY ARE OF mixed European heritage—Danish, French, Irish, and Scottish, but, unlike so many in the area, neither Swedish nor Norwegian. They said that during the Great Depression when they were growing up, their mother had ways of doing things so that they didn't feel the hard times. They raised a big garden and canned food. They had no electricity and no freezer.

Nina, who grew up picking, canning, and eating blueberries, gave Berdella Johnson her recipe for blueberries:

*Put the blueberries on to cook.*

*Add some sugar, sweeten to taste.*

*Cook just until the berries crack.*

Nina said she thought it was better if the berries split open when you cook them (which they are likely to do if you cook them in the open-kettle method of preserving, rather than the cold-pack method), because then the juice is more flavorful. You know it's cooked when the berries split. Blueberry sauce is basically the fruit with some juice, usually eaten with a spoon. It's like blueberry pie filling, only without any cornstarch or other thickener to give it body. The juice is as thin as water. Nina said they often broke up bread in the sauce dish, and then poured the blueberry sauce over it, adding cream to make it taste good.

One time Betty had found a spot with such an abundance of berries that she hated to leave it to go home and milk the cows. Not wanting to waste such a good picking spot, she hung her

straw hat in the tree to help Nina find the spot the next day. The next day, Nina found the hat and commenced picking. When she looked up, however, she panicked, because she didn't see the hat any more. She was afraid she was really lost. Then she turned her head and looked straight up. There was the hat, hanging right above her in the tree. She was greatly relieved!

Another time, Nina remembers walking out of the woods carrying two berry containers, one in each hand. Mosquitoes set upon her. They were really bad, but she couldn't brush them away or swat them off because her hands were full.

More recently (2001), Nina went out with a coffee cup. She hoped to find just enough berries to put into a batch of muffins. The berries are clearly not as abundant as they used to be.

*You know blueberries are cooked when the berries split.*

Betty said she likes to drive up to Crex Meadows; it's peaceful. Nina said that, when her son visits, they like to drive up there together, and he really loves it. They see deer and blueberries. Betty likes to drive around in Crex Meadows Wildlife Area at least twice each summer. She said she used to pick blueberries at Crex; there wasn't so much brush there then. "You never picked berries in the same area two years in a row," Nina added.

# Berries



**Michael Newago**

*Born: November 2, 1918*

**Kathryn Munson**

*Born: May 29, 1919*

KATHRYN INTRODUCED ME AND THEN participated in Mike's interview near Red Cliff, where Mike grew up.

Mike said that, when he went out to the barrens, he picked blueberries. He remembers picking berries when he was four years old. He picked blueberries once a year. They hired a car to get there with a whole group of people. They camped out there, about 100 people, all sleeping in tents or shacks. Old and young, they were all picking blueberries. There was a guy right there who would buy them. Someone from Bayfield bought the berries and sold them for a higher price. He transported them in a pick up truck or whatever he had. They put the blueberries in pails, then transferred them into crates. They ate some blueberries fresh and canned a lot. Even while they picked them, they were canning them.

Kathryn recalled that the first blueberry meal was always dumplings. The next morning, it was pancakes with sauce. It was all cooked over an open fire.



*People used to pick gooseberries too.*

Mike observed that there are not so many blueberries around any more. Kathryn said there's a cycle. Every five or whatever years they get blueberries.

Kathryn explained that the DNR sprayed weeds where she used to pick wild strawberries, but there's nothing left there now. People used to pick gooseberries too, but she believes the DNR sprayed the weeds there and killed all the gooseberries.

Kathryn told the story about a boy named George who was picking berries. George was three years old at the time. The adults couldn't get him away from the blueberries. They saw a snake coming towards him. George was by himself. He was crying because he didn't want to leave the blueberries. They picked him up and made him leave.

*Three year-old George didn't want to leave the blueberries even when a potentially scary snake was approaching.*



DNR ARCHIVE



**Berdella Gail Hanson Johnson**

*Born: July 30, 1932*

BERDELLA SAID HER MOM PUT UP 100 quarts of blueberries the week Berdella was born. “Wow! Her back must have been aching. But that was 1932, the Depression.” The berries were free for the taking, and people did what they had to do to get the food they needed. Berdella suspects her dad did the picking and cleaning of the berries for her that time. They ate the berries mostly, almost entirely as sauce, for breakfast, lunch or dinner. In the winter, fresh fruits were not available then, as they are today. Sometimes her mom made cram, but only infrequently because they didn’t like that Swedish delicacy. Cram is the juice of the berries thickened with cornstarch. Though Berdella thinks she’d like it now, at that time she much preferred sauce, served with plenty of thick cream. They put cream on almost everything. In later days, when one could buy blueberries in cans, blueberry crisp was good and easy to make. Berdella likes her crisp warm.



*During the Great Depression, the berries were still free for the taking, and people did what they had to do to get the food they needed.*

Based on her experience, Berdella provided the following procedures and recipe for making blueberry sauce:

*Go out to the woods on a hot, sticky day in mid-to late July. Wear long sleeves and long pants to protect against scratches from bushes, sticks, and branches and to help ward off mosquitoes, deer flies, and bees. Wear a wide-brimmed straw hat to shade your sweaty brow with a string tie under the chin to prevent hat loss when you walk through heavy vegetation. Look through your closets to find an old pair of shoes you can wear to wade through swampy areas. Once out there, watch out for bears and maintain a constant vigilance for snakes. Be sure you have a quart jar of water to quench your thirst.*

*Find a good patch thick with berries. It’s not worth stooping down or getting up again for just a few berries. Pick carefully, avoiding leaves, green or red berries, or other scrap in the pail. At all times, try to avoid poison ivy, which grows the thickest in the spots where the berries look the juiciest. If you’re smart, you carry an extra pail into the woods with you. (Sometimes Berdella used a small syrup pail slung around the neck with a leather belt or piece of rope twine. This worked well and gave her two hands to pick berries or push back branches to find the hidden ones.) Empty your pail into a larger one when it gets about three-quarters full, or as necessary. If you’re operating under the two-pail system, take the red bandanna from around your neck and tie it to a tree branch to mark the spot where you leave your berry pail. After wandering around for*

# Berries



*Avoid poison ivy, which grows thickest in the spots where the berries look the juiciest.*

*a while, all the trees and bushes look alike. You don't want all your picking to go for naught by losing the pail!*

*Pick some more and some more and some more, if the day is good. Since you are no longer carrying your bandanna to wipe your sweaty brow, substitute your shirtsleeve. When your back is aching and your knees stiff, you may leave, but only if you have accumulated a respectable number of mosquito bites and plenty of berries. Take care not to spill or drop berries as you walk out of the woods.*

*At home, carefully pick through all the berries, a small handful at a time, removing all stray sticks, stink bugs, leaves, walking sticks, and unripe (red or green) fruit. When undressing yourself, check thoroughly for ticks.*

*The next morning, place the berries in a large kettle, just barely covered with water. Add a little sugar, not too much, just enough to sweeten slightly. Bring to a boil and cook until done.*

*Now comes the tricky part. You have already washed and sterilized the correct number of canning jars. By guess or by gosh, you know the right amount. Experience helps. While the sauce is boiling hot, cup by cup, fill the jars, being careful not to burn your fingers or drip the juice on the counter or your clothes. The juice stain does not come off. In the meantime, the gray, zinc lids and rubber rings have been boiled in water. Put the rubber ring on the filled jar, add cover, screw on tight, and up-end the jar for about 20 minutes. Fill the next jar, the next, and the next.*

*When finally finished, you have a sticky mess on the stove, an apron splattered with juice, large spoons,*



*If you're smart, you'll carry an extra pail into the woods when you go blueberry picking.*

*empty jars and lids (unless you estimated accurately), and many large, dirty kettles. When you're in the business, you don't just do one kettle; you do a whole lot. It's probably about noon by now: time to wash your face, don the overalls and shirt you wore yesterday, refill your water jar, and go out to get more berries before the bears eat them all. On your way out the door, stop and look back at the symmetrical row of shining jars standing on the kitchen cupboard, now right-side up. This glorious view provides motivation for another hot day in the woods picking blueberries!*

In spite of all this, Berdella still claims to like blueberry picking! But she says she is prone to losing direction easily after turning around a couple of times in the woods, so she doesn't go out alone. A number of years ago, her husband, Glen, forbade her to go out after berries any more. "We could have bought a lot of berries for the price of the medication and doctor's call required" to relieve her poison ivy.

# Berries



## Franklin Basna

*Born: June 25, 1914*

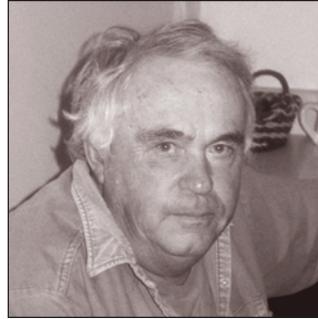
## Kathryn Munson

*Born: May 29, 1919*

KATHRYN PARTICIPATED IN THE interview with Frank Basna. She called the barrens the “plains”; their families picked blueberries there. Kathryn said the berries grew under the trees. Frank concurred. There was a lot of scrub oak, and Frank said the berries in the shade were bigger. Kathryn went on to describe how people made tents with poles and a blanket over them for camping while they picked blueberries. They baked bread on the side of the campfire and ate a lot of salt pork.

*Kathryn would like to see the CCC come back to replant trees, take out all that scrub oak, and “get rid of those blackberries.”*

Everyone seems to appreciate blueberries in the barrens, but not all berries seem to be created equal. Kathryn would like to see the Civilian Conservation Corps come back to replant trees, take out all that scrub oak, and “get rid of those blackberries.”



## Walter (Buck) Follis

*Born: June 6, 1939*

BUCK’S EARLIEST MEMORY OF THE sand country was going to pick blueberries with his mom, when he was five or six years old. It was a poor berry year, and it was hard to pick enough to make one pie. Some of the years between have been good berry years.

Buck’s wife, Shirley, likes the area. She came from a very populated Finnish settlement. She picked flowers “out there,” enjoyed all those little lakes, and picked blueberries in the barrens.



*Kathryn and Frank recalled how blackberries were not as popular as blueberries.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

## Berries



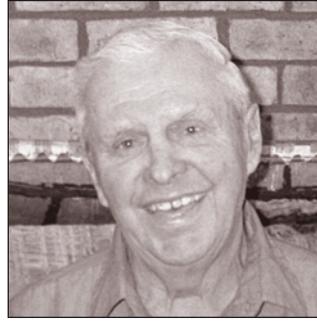
**Marjorie Martell Tutor**  
*Born: January 15, 1912*

EVEN WHEN SHE LIVED IN THE CLAY country outside of Iron River, Margie went back to the sandhills of her childhood to pick berries. There were lots of blueberries when she was a girl and even after she was married. She'd go down the logging roads to get to them. There were generally a lot of scrub oaks where she picked them. When they made plow streaks to plant trees, she said there were better berries following the disturbance. She looked at a photo of a burned area and said it looked like the place she picked berries.

*"If 'Mom' said  
'pick blueberries!'  
you picked berries!"*

There are not so many berries now, she said, though she hadn't been there for a few years. She used to pick them in quart boxes and sell them by the crate. There were sixteen boxes to a crate. The berries were examined and graded, and she was paid accordingly.

Her mother died when she was two, but when she was a girl her stepmother canned the berries. "If 'Mom' said 'pick blueberries!' you picked berries!" Marjorie liked to pick berries and can them. She said people would watch where you went to pick, and they would go there too. When her children were young, she took them berry picking.



**Russell Lester Connor**  
*Born: March 1, 1923*

RUSS, WHO IS ONE-EIGHTH CHIPPEWA, said Indians used to burn patches of woodland to release the necessary potash into the soil for blueberries. He told me that Danbury was once the "Blueberry Capitol of the World". Poor people picked a carload a week for ten cents a quart. The Mister, Missus, and three little kids could pick 20–30 quarts a day, for about \$3 a day, which was good money in the 1930s. Russ said they didn't talk about where the berries were marketed, but he figures they were shipped by rail to Minneapolis, St. Paul, or Chicago. In the peak of the harvest, there would be about a carload a week shipped out. There was and still is a saying about when the blueberries are ripe for picking: "You should be able to pick enough for a pie on the Fourth of July!" Many of the blueberries were canned and preserved in this way by the local people. Russ' mother used to say that the blueberry canned quart for quart. In other words, if you started with a quart of fresh blueberries, you would have an equal quart of preserved blueberries after you canned them. This is not true of other canned fruit.

Russ and his wife, Lila, picked 78 quarts of blueberries the summer before the interview. They froze them, gave them away, or made them into pies. There are deer flies and mosquitoes out in the berry patches, so many people won't pick them. But Russ is "waiting to see the guy who won't eat the pie."



**Nora Searles**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Harold Searles**

*Born: September 13, 1911*

**HAROLD AND NORA LIVE IN HERTEL.**

Harold's grandfather, Andrew, and his father, Clarence Searles, bought the cranberry marsh from Waterman, a fellow who lived in Minneapolis, in 1923. It was a run-down marsh with native vines that didn't produce well. Andrew and Clarence found the Searles Jumbo vine in the Wisconsin Rapids area. In 1929, fresh out of high school, Harold moved to Hertel and worked for his grandpa on the weekends, doing weeding or harvesting. In winter, he did the sanding. They put sand on the ice to melt and go down into the vines. This practice shortens the vine and then it grows fresh from that. If the vine gets too long, it needs to be pruned.

Today they use machinery, but it used to be all handwork. Sand and water are required for a cranberry marsh; flowing water and good drainage. To protect the berries from frost, they

flood the cranberries. They get water from Lake Pokegama, which is dammed to hold water or let it go. With lots of rain, the Clam River would flood and cost them most of their crop. This happened every five years or so, and they had to haul dirt night and day to try to hold up the dam. Once one guy with a truck went into a part of the dam that wasn't very solid and sank into the sand. The water flowed through and that was the end of the dam that year. Once the man who was supposed to be walking and watching the dam at night fell asleep, and the water came in past him. One time somebody didn't like the dam and dug a hole right through it and drained the lake. Today it looks easy. Now they use a sprinkler system to protect the cranberries from frost. They have diesel pumps because electric power can go out too. It's 12–14° colder in the marsh than it is in the house, so frost is a real concern.



*The Searles family bought the cranberry marsh in Hertel in 1923. There are some hundred year-old cranberry vines in that marsh.*



*Sand and water are required for a cranberry marsh. Sand from this quarry is used to cover the ice on the vines. This practice shortens the vines so they grow fresh from there.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

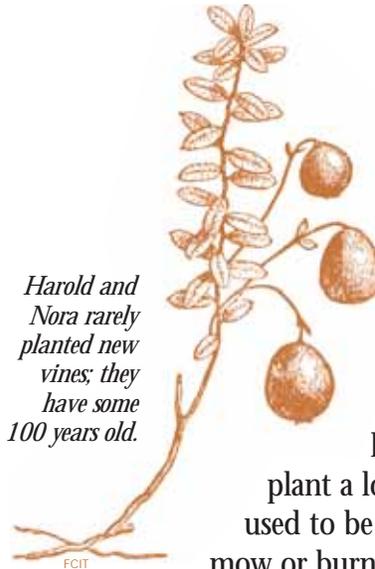
*It takes three or four years  
for a section of vine  
to produce.*

Nora remembers dealing with the cold back in 1934. Her dad taught school north of highway 70 on H. He would drain the car so it wouldn't freeze in the winter. He had to fill the radiator with warm water in the morning when it was below zero weather. They didn't plow the side roads, so he'd carry the can of water a quarter mile to the plowed road where the car was. Today, Nora says, "Icy roads are the worst thing, otherwise we love it here."

There have been changes in the cranberry marsh over time. The beds were laid in little pieces, all hand-raked, originally. It was less work to level a small piece than a big piece. When they built the marsh, they scalped the peat off and piled it on a dike or dam. Harold said the whole cranberry marsh has been replanted. Bogs don't stay level. You put weight on them and they change position. It was all replanted to Searles vine. Searles Jumbo is a kind of cranberry that was started by Harold's grandfather. Once three-quarters of Wisconsin's cranberry crops were Searles berries; now they're growing hybrids.

It takes three or four years for a section of vine to produce. Harold explained how they used to plant them "with a marker board with spikes six inches apart." They'd drag the board over the sand to mark it and put the vines in. A "spud" was a piece of metal used to push the vine into the sand to plant it. You would try to get some of the vine into the peat below the sand. But if the peat was too close to the top, when it froze, it would push the vine up and out. Today they use a disk with metal wheels. It's not sharp, but it puts weight on

*Harold and  
Nora rarely  
planted new  
vines; they  
have some  
100 years old.*



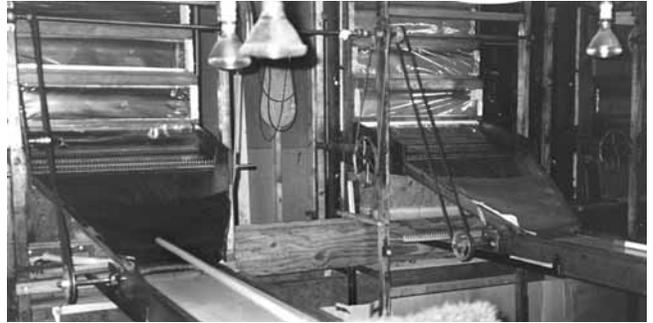
the vines and pushes them right in. The planter machine is heavy, but you can plant a lot more than you used to be able to. When you mow or burn the old vine off, you cover it with three or four inches of sand and plant new vines the following spring. But Harold and Nora rarely planted new vines. They have some vines a hundred years old! They still raise mostly Searles vines. Searles vines don't produce as heavily as other vines, but the berry is better tasting than any other, at least according to Harold and Nora.

They control for insects now using insecticide from a helicopter. They fertilize the vines with a helicopter too. They used to use spreader machines they pushed. They used to use electric mower chippers to mow the grass to keep it from seeding. Now they use a weed deterrent. The hand rakes were replaced by mechanical rakes in the late 1940s. Cranberries were originally picked by hand, then scooped up. Harold said they were dry raked in the east, but in Wisconsin, his grandfather started using water. The berries float up and you scoop them right up. This is called "water raking".

Weeds in the river constitute a problem for Harold and Nora. Weeds grow in the ditches so they need to clear the ditches in order to get the water through. The ditch-cleaner machine is like a bulldozer or tractor. Muskrats add to the ditch problem: they dig in the beds and fill the ditches.

# Berries

*The cranberries ride on a conveyor belt now. They are “degrassed” and blown dry.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

## **Nora and Harold Searles** *(continued)*

Though the muskrats eat the weeds, they put holes in the dikes too. Beaver are not much of a problem, but sometimes they chew holes in the wooden splash boards or gates. Willow brush seeding into the marsh is a problem too.

Nora and Harold don't hear any complaints from people, because there's nobody on the lake. Harold's grandfather and dad bought the land, including most of the lake, so there are no cottages on it. They have water rights so they can take water from the lake. It's a spring fed lake so the water level comes back up again. If there were more people on the lake, there would be more problems. While there are 1,000 acres at

Searles, only 66 are used to cultivate cranberries. But, if they sold lots on the lake, they wouldn't be able to pay taxes on the land because the value would increase so much. In central Wisconsin, near Wisconsin Rapids, people are scalping off the cornfields and making high ground beds for cranberries. The farmers want money from cranberries, but they need water supplies, sprinklers, and drainage. Besides, you need to wait a few years to get the berries.

You spray the berries in June. You can't spray after thirty days before the harvest. You harvest the berries at the end of September or early October. Metal boats like little barges are used for harvesting them. The old rake looks like a scoop with slots in it. The cranberries ride on a conveyor belt now. A “degrasser” separates them from the grass. A blower dries them on a screen. In the mill, two people separate the rotten berries from the good ones on the conveyor belt. Then the berries go down big funnels into 12-ounce plastic bags for \$1.25 a bag.

After they pick the berries, they ship them to Minneapolis and Chicago, in boxes on semi trucks. They used to ship to California, but now berries from Washington and Oregon supply that state. They still ship a lot to Belgium, and they used to ship a lot to England. Harold said they have an excellent record for shipping good fruit. The berries arrive in good shape and they taste better.

Near Thanksgiving time, they flood the berry marsh. When it freezes, they put sand on the ice, when the ice is thick enough to hold the truck. In winter, the vines themselves are red.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Cranberries used to be scooped up out of the water using a scoop with slots in it. This is called “water raking”.*

# Berries



**Judith Pratt-Shelley**

*Born: January 24, 1959*



JUDY GREW UP NEAR BAYFIELD. NOW she works at the Tribal Center of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

Judy remembers that when she was a girl, Sunday was family day. Her parents worked full-time during the week, so they liked to focus on the family on Sunday. “We’d get in the car and go out to the barrens to pick blueberries or wild apples or raspberries.” They’d go together up a fire lane looking for blueberries. The side of the road would be just blue with berries. They would stop the car, jump out, and pick and eat, pick and eat blueberries and more blueberries. It was the experience of doing something outside together as a family that kept their bond with the earth, and that shaped her career decisions. She likes going out in the barrens with her two kids now too, although she doesn’t do it as often as she used to.

*It's part of Judy's heritage to gather things from the landscape.*

They had traditions for when fruits were ripe. For example, when the apples were ready, they had homemade pancakes and applesauce. When they found the fruit ripe, they had tons of it. It was fun to see a big bunch of something delicious. She said the blackberries were ripe at the time of the interview, which was in August.

Judy had visitors from Sweden that summer. More than anything, Ursula wanted to see a bear. Judy

took the visitors blueberry picking. They looked up the trail. A bear saw them and stood right up. It was the highlight of Ursula’s trip to the U.S.

Judy hates to see signs inviting everyone to come pick the blueberries in the barrens. It’s part of the auto-tour. She says you can see ten cars with Illinois plates bringing people to pick berries. She never envisioned sharing the resources with just anybody who could get there. She expected to share with the people who live there and those especially seeking the experience. Berry picking should not be a “sold” activity.

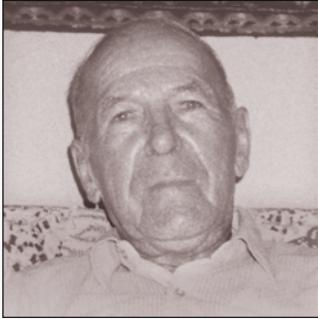
Judy likes to gather juneberries and hazelnuts as well as blueberries. It’s part of her heritage to gather things from the landscape. Judy thinks the land should be managed for the future, not just for the current generation. We should avoid using up more than our share in our generation. Judy was including blueberries when she said we all need to use the resources of the land, not abuse them.



*Left: They'd get in the car and go out to the barrens to pick raspberries.*

*Right: Judy also likes to gather juneberries.*

LEFT: DNR ARCHIVE, RIGHT: ROBERT L. PEIFFER



**Francis Lampella**

*Born: December 2, 1919*

FRANCIS WAS RAISED IN THE FINNISH community around Washburn. He said the sand was no good for farmland, but he did pick blueberries there. Picking blueberries was a territorial activity. “If you invaded somebody else’s patch, they’d chase you away.” Once he and his sister went to pick blueberries and a man yelled at them: “I found this patch last week!” Francis says they use controlled burns to get blueberries back. They take small patches and burn them.

“The other day” he went looking for blueberries and saw wood lying there looking “good for firewood”. It’s the same as when he was a boy, but there are no berries there now because the plantation and other growth is thick. He could pick a whole bucket full ten to fifteen years ago. The berries started to ripen after the Fourth of July. They didn’t ripen all at the same time. He’d pick them from the middle of July into August. He’d get \$3 per case in the 1930s. Now it’s \$3 a quart. He likes to make blueberry pie with the wild berries. He’ll walk two miles for a blueberry pie, he admitted. But the domestic blueberries are not as sweet as wild berries. The ground used to be white with their blossoms in the spring. Sometimes the berries bloom early, and the frost gets them. Or the blueberries get choked out. When you burn with close surveillance, the berries come back.

“Barren land won’t grow nothing,” he said. You can’t farm the barrens, but you could raise domestic blueberries for a pick-your-own operation.

In late August, at the time of the interview, Francis said big blackberries were ripening, and crows were hanging around in anticipation.



**Alexander (Ike)  
Louis Gokee**

*Born: December 29, 1918*

IN THE 1950s, IKE AND HIS WIFE RAN A restaurant that served hot dogs, hamburgers, ice cream, and pop. He never mentioned blueberry pie, but among his early memories were picking blueberries and chasing a gopher. Berry picking wasn’t fun for him as a kid. “We had to work,” he said. He put the berries in tin pails like the ones used for collecting maple sap for syrup.

*“You’ve got to burn a  
blueberry patch to help the  
seeds bust out.”*

Ike says there’s not much blueberrying in the barrens any more. You can’t find the blueberries like before. They plowed and planted trees in there. When they plowed and turned over the soil (Ike guesses “they” is the DNR. He said he likes to blame DNR for everything.), they let the seeds out and the blueberry plants grew. The disturbance made them grow, but after a few years the berries died out. “You’ve got to burn a blueberry patch to help the seeds bust out,” he said. There’s a blueberry marsh at Lamont’s Farm, about nine miles from Ike’s place. Ike used to camp out there. “They used to burn that blueberry marsh.” He took his kids to the other side of the peninsula, past Cornucopia to Lost Creek to pick berries. Now days, Ike says, blueberries that are grown are tame, high-bush berries. “They don’t taste as good as the wild ones, though they grow bigger.”

# Berries



**Matt Welter**

*Born: May 31, 1965*

MATT BEGAN LIVING IN THE AREA IN 1992. One thing he likes to do there is pick blueberries. One of his heroes in the barrens is Mike Van Stappen, who wrote the book *Northern Passages*, a book of outdoor essays describing northwestern Wisconsin and the Lake Superior region. Mike expressed how great it is to pick blueberries. Matt said he also described a local annoyance, the “mysterious blueberry warbler.” These “warblers” are people who are stunned by seeing so many blueberries. They get out of big cars, leaving the car doors open like “wings,” in their excitement to pick blueberries.

*The berries started to ripen after the fourth of July, but they didn't ripen all at the same time.*



**Mariam Esther Lebeck Lang**

*Born: July 23, 1921*

MARIAM AND HER HUSBAND FLOYD participated in a group interview in Grantsburg. Like her mother, Mariam is a Minnesota native. Her father, August Lebeck, came from Sweden. Mariam came to Wisconsin in 1934, and she's resided here ever since. She listed herself as a farm wife on the interview sheet. Mariam said that once, about fifty years ago, she and Floyd went to the barrens to pick blueberries, got stuck in the sand, and didn't even find any berries. They finally hiked all the way to County Highway O, carrying the baby with them. Lawrence Sorenson came along with the county grader and pulled them out of the sand. So much for berry picking that time. The baby, however, has grown up to be a veterinarian in Ladysmith, and Floyd now “farms” sweet corn and sweet mama squash in the garden.

# Berries

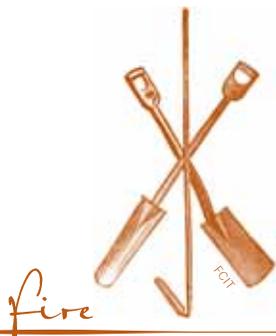
# fire



STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

*Ray lived in the wire grass camp where they harvested grass to make carpets. They burned the area every spring. Geese and cows ran to the burned place. Potash came from the fire and the new grass was sweet.*

*In a wildfire, Dorothy was forced to evacuate without her husband. Finally permitted to return home hours later, she found him still there. He had back-fired the house and saved it. A neighbor's house burned to the ground, the stove and refrigerator completely melted.*



# fire



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*Historically, fires have been a natural part of the sand country. The history of fire suppression is part of this tale too.*

Most of the people interviewed about the barrens had some account of fire to share, whether asked about the topic or not. It wasn't always a wildfire they spoke of; there were different kinds of fires, including house fires and bonfires. But whether you look at it from the perspective of fire fighting, forest fire prevention, fire safety, or burning by prescription as part of a land management plan, the element of fire is inextricably woven into the story of the Northwest Sands Area and the lives of the people residing there.

Biologists refer to the barrens ecosystem as “fire-dependent”. Even the rugged jack pines depend on the heat of fire to open their cones and release the seeds. Historically, Ojibwa people burned to drive and attract game or better the next year's berry crop. Now biologists prescribe controlled burns to create and maintain wildlife habitat.

The history of fire suppression is part of this tale too, with the advent of forestry as a profession. It's interesting to note how the tools for fighting fires have changed over time. The bucket, shovel, and burlap bag were replaced with portable backpacks carrying water, trucks with powerful hoses, and bulldozers. Now airplanes carry large water bombs to drop on fires to extinguish them.

As progress comes to the barrens and more and more people move into formerly remote areas, there is concern that the potential danger from fire has increased, and those residents of the woods in out-of-the-way places are most at risk.



**James Orvin Evrard**  
*Born: July 19, 1942*

JIM CREDITS THE SHARP-TAILED GROUSE as the reason we still have barrens in the Northwest Sands Area at all, and, indirectly, he credits fire. It was the desire to maintain habitat for the sharptails that prompted management by fire. Wildlife managers fought the interests of foresters for sharp-tailed grouse.

Norm Stone was the first manager at Crex Meadows, and he was one of the first people in Wisconsin to use fire to manage wildlife habitat. The Northwest Sands Area is the only place in Wisconsin where fire was used to manage sharp-tailed grouse. Norm's supervisor at Spooner, Burt Dahlberg, always supported the program. Burt was a real gentleman and an old-time woodsman, soft-spoken, fair, and honest, with an ax and a canvas canoe as companions. He managed for sharptails too. The research work of wildlife biologists Frederick and Fran Hamerstrom in the late 1940s and '50s made the point that we'd lose sharptails if we didn't manage for them. Managing for sharp-tailed grouse meant maintaining open habitat. In Georgia, biologists set an example by burning to manage for bobwhite quail. Wallace Grange, who developed the Sandhill Wildlife Area, was a wildlife biologist who started using fire. But Norm Stone was one of the pioneers who had the guts to start burning on a large scale. This was very unpopular with the forest rangers and was contrary to the teachings of Smokey Bear. Norm set up a system of water for firebreaks so he could burn large blocks of land safely. He got graduate students involved, and their research provided him with facts to support his plans.

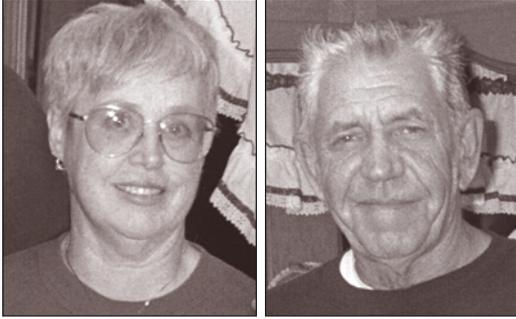
The students scientifically documented the immediate reaction of prairie plants following a burn, which removed the canopy that shaded the ground. He got the academics on his side without initially having to be one himself. Norm could say "I told you so," and it was all documented with scientific proof.

Jim says resistance to burning is dying. There is more wildlife here, for one thing, and you can't argue with results.



PHOTOS: ROBERT QUEEN

*It was the desire to maintain habitat for the sharptails that prompted management by fire.*



**Sena Borup Christopherson**

*Born: November 26, 1941*

**Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**

*Born: July 11, 1934*

SENA AND BUDDY SAID THEY'D SEEN many spring burns. They understood that the managers who are burning claim to be bringing the land back to the glacial state. Buddy said there's fine soil, and after a burn there's nothing there, no vegetation. When they do the burns in the spring, the fire wipes out all the baby animals, all the way down the food chain. Everything is gone when you burn again and again, Buddy says.

One warm, windy day in May 1959, Buddy was with the guy who was driving the milk truck on his route. After the guy finished the route, he went home to cook dinner. A piece of paper blew up the chimney and caught fire. The fire burned many hundreds of acres, all the way to the St. Croix River. Thankfully, nobody was killed. Buddy's wife, Sena, was a senior in high school at the time. She remembered that they saw the smoke, and the senior boys helped fight the fire. They fought the fire with big "cats," machines like bulldozers. After the fire, Sena drove up north to see the burned area and all the damage.

Buddy couldn't speak about fire without some mention of Norm Stone, the DNR wildlife manager who initiated the Crex Meadows project and prescribed burning. Norm didn't try to convince people of the benefits of his chosen course of action; he just burned. It may be the cheapest tool, but it bothered Buddy that no one was asked; the burning was just done.

*Buddy said there's fine soil,  
and after a burn  
there's nothing there.*



ROBERT QUEEN

*Buddy understands that managers burn to restore the landscape to the way it was historically, but he is concerned that spring burns may wipe out baby animals.*



**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**

*Born: December 8, 1928*

**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

DON AND HIS WIFE LOIS SHARED A number of memories of fires. In 1940, Don started working for the DNR in the Sterling Fire Tower. It was his job to look out for smoke. There were no big fires when he worked there. That was all open land, with only a little patch of trees. A few years later, in the mid-1940s, a fire burned that area off. Within ten years, it was all jack pine. The fire burned away the grass so the cones could seed.

Don also worked at the Grantsburg Forest Station from 1946 to 1948 after a stint in the service. He said he rode the tractor a lot; it was seasonal work.

People feared fires, and with good reason. Historically there have been some bad ones. Lois said her parents talked about two large fires that occurred in Minnesota during their lifetimes,

the Hinckley Fire of the late 1890s and the Cloquet Fire in 1918. One town, Moose Lake, Minnesota, was burned up in both fires. The Hinckley Fire burned right across the river in Minnesota. After the Cloquet Fire, there were only five buildings left in Cloquet. The smoke from that fire was very dense in Grantsburg. News didn't get around very quickly then, but Don's family heard about it first hand from Oscar Benson, a fellow who worked in the paper mill in Cloquet. When the fire happened, Oscar walked all the way to Don's dad's house with just the clothes on his back and without a bath. He walked about 100 miles from Cloquet in three days. There was a terrible loss of life in both fires. The Hinckley Fire covered a bigger area. There were no firebreaks around the buildings—just the fields served as firebreaks.

Even then, there was controlled burning. Lois' parents burned the brush areas into the 1930s. The first forest ranger in the Grantsburg area, Tony Omernick, started forest protection around 1931 or so. People were required to have a permit to burn. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) men camped in tents, but they had tractors. The first year they had equipment was 1934.

Around the same time, there was a wildfire by Fish Lake. Thousands of acres burned. Don's dad was fire warden at the time. Don was just finishing breakfast around 9:30 a.m., when he saw smoke from the southeast. Peat fires had been smoldering all summer. He knew he needed to help fight the fire. Don's job was to chase rabbits. He was 13 and a fast runner. The rabbits would come squealing

*Don worked in a fire tower in the early 1940s. It was his job to look out for smoke.*



DNR ARCHIVE



**Lolita Spooner Taylor**  
*Born: July 19, 1908*

out of the fire, their fur aflame. He'd hit the rabbits with a shovel and knock them back into the fire to keep the fire from spreading.

Around 1930, Don's dad got burned in a crown fire, a fire that moved through the treetops. That fire moved through a mile and half of pine timber in one minute and 30 seconds; it just blew up in smoke and flames. Tony Omernick, who was the forest ranger at the time, was on the hill when it blew. Don's dad was backfiring, trying to save a bunch of mailboxes. He hit the ditch; fortunately, he had a wool shirt on. Another fellow who was there had a cotton shirt on and was badly burned. The fire burned the cotton shirt right off his back—he spent seven months in the hospital. Don's dad was in the hospital in Grantsburg afterwards. He had put his hand up over his face to protect it, and you could see the imprint of his hand on his face. The rest of his face was covered with water blisters.

Around 1911, the Crex Carpet Company cut the grass, and the farmers burned the marsh in the spring because the dry grass in summer was a fire hazard. The burning made good blueberry country and good food for prairie chickens.

Not all memories or associations with fire spell danger. Lois remembers playing by a fire in a pail when she was a girl. The smoke helped to keep the mosquitoes away. Even the cows came to stand in the smoke.

Don isn't in favor of what's happening in the sand country now; people are building houses in areas where there's a risk of forest fire and therefore a risk of loss of life.

LOLITA RESIDES IN THE WEBSTER AREA. She spoke of the Crex Meadows fires in the 1950s. One fire burned between Falun and Alpha to the Yellow River, almost to Danbury. Her son fought that fire. The fire would leap the road from tree to tree.

The Indians had controlled fires for blueberries, Lolita pointed out. She thinks we should still have them. They do a good job with controlled burns at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area now.

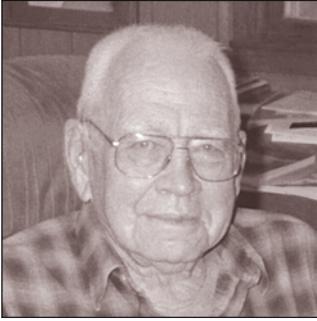
There was a fire in the spring of 1998. A neighbor had planted pines, apples, and grapes. The township was burning brush on a windy day, and they burned the neighbor's stuff. The resultant lawsuit was still going on in November, at the time of this interview.

*The fire would leap the road  
from tree to tree.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

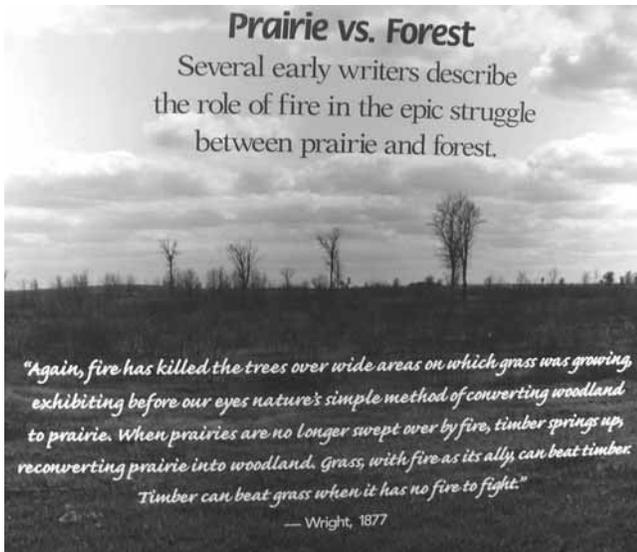
*Now people are building houses in areas where there's a risk of forest fire and therefore a risk of loss of life.*



**Raymond Bergerson**  
Born: March 4, 1913

RAY, WHO LIVED IN THE CREX CARPET Company wiregrass camp when he was young, said that wiregrass and hay once grew in what is now Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. According to Ray, “Crex” is the Latin name for wiregrass, hence the name of the current wildlife area. The wiregrass grew on floating bogs, but in the 1930s, the bogs burned out until there was no peat left. Then the wiregrass was gone too.

*In the early 1930s,  
Ray remembers fires going  
faster than a horse could run.*



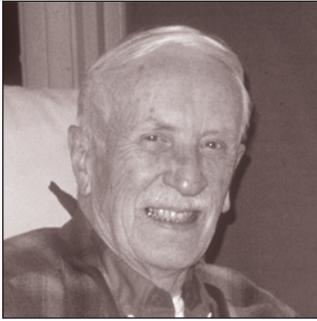
An exhibit at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area's visitor center interprets the important role of fire in "the epic struggle between prairie and forest" in the barrens ecosystem.

The Crex Carpet Company burned the grass every spring to keep the underbrush down. In the dry years, there was so much smoke there that you had to walk ahead of the car to tell the driver where to go to stay on the road.

In the early 1930s, Ray remembers fires going faster than a horse could run. When fire gets going in tall grass, it's like opening the door to a wood stove. Ray said he could sit in a room and read a magazine from the light of the fire outside. In early spring, everybody put in firebreaks or burned the land around their homes to protect themselves and their buildings from wildfires. Two or three families got together to burn. "You've got to burn!" Ray declared.

In Grantsburg, he used to watch the little geese. There was nothing for them to eat where the fire had not burned. The cows, too, ran to where the fire had been to eat. There was fertilizer, potash from the fire, which inspired new grass. You could taste the difference in the grass yourself.

But now there are too many houses around to burn the land the way people did in the past. You would be liable for damages if a house burned. Today, Grantsburg has more equipment and help for fighting fires, so they suppress fires when they occur. Ray commented that in Minnesota "you haven't been allowed to light a match for years."

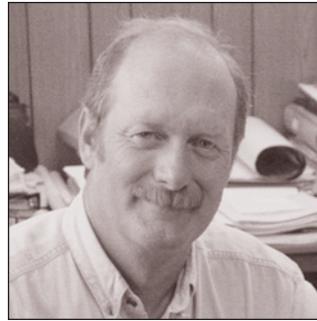


**Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr.**  
*Born: August 18, 1926*

BUD, WHO WORKED IN THE AREA AS A wildlife biologist, talked about presettlement fires in the northwest sands, set by lightning or, more likely, by Native Americans. The area is susceptible to forest fires, yet, at the same time, fire is a management tool. It costs money to keep the land open and in prairie. Suppression of forest fires has drastically changed the ecosystem. The forest grew after we got fire protection and farmers moved out.

Bud mentioned the Ekdahl Fire around 1980. That fire burned tens of thousands of acres, including cabins and homes. The people who lived there were mad at the Department of Natural Resources because the DNR wouldn't let people go into the burned area to see if they still had homes.

Years before, around 1947, the Mothers' Day Fire was even bigger. That fire burned in Burnett County and into Namekagon Barrens. Now Bud says the proliferation of homes in the Grantsburg area represents a high fire hazard. A fire in those soils can jump massive firebreaks. Houses can literally explode from the intense heat.



**Steven C. Coffin**  
*Born: October 7, 1950*

STEVE, WHO WORKS AS MANAGER OF Lands and Timber at Mosinee Paper in Solon Springs, claims lots of experience with fires. He remembers the biggest one in his experience, the Five Mile Fire. It was a warm, windy spring day in 1977. The fire burned west of Minong and Gordon to the St. Croix River. It burned a lot of Mosinee Paper's land. Apparently the campfire of a non-resident got away. People feel they have to burn leaves or something, with some kind of "a man has to do what a man has to do" attitude. The head of that fire was about a mile across. The flame heights were over 150–200 feet high. Steve was with a company logging crew that gave the DNR assistance in building a firebreak there for 48 hours. They built the firebreak with shovels and a 'dozer. Some people worried about their homes across the St. Croix, but the fire didn't jump the river. There were no fatalities, but quite a few houses burned in that fire.

Now there would be ten times as many houses burned because of all the construction. With the urbanization going on in rural areas, the potential for fires is high, and it's very hard for the local fire department to protect the homes.

Steve acknowledged that prescribed burns have a place in wildlife management and managed forests, but he doesn't do prescribed burns. "There isn't enough equipment and people to do it safely," he says.

*With the urbanization going on in rural areas, the potential for fires is high. Local fire departments find it difficult to protect homes.*



ROBERT OUIEEN



**Robert John Becker**  
*Born: March 26, 1927*

BOB, A RETIRED FORESTER AND FREELANCE writer, said that Native Americans burned for blueberries and game. Then came the settlement of immigrants. But the sand country was never intended for agriculture, and when the Great Depression forced people off the land, the clearings succeeded into jack pine. Now the land is going back to growing timber. But there's an influx of people building homes, regardless of the character of the barrens. Those barrens will burn periodically. People with year-round homes are at risk from the fires, and they are also potential starters of those fires.

Bob talked about specific fires of his career. The Five Mile Fire of 1977 burned southwest of Minong, about 13 miles north across the barrens to the St. Croix River. That was a 12,000–13,000 acre fire. In 1980, the Oak Lake Fire burned about the same acreage, northwest of Trego, a few miles outside Spooner. A rapid fire, it moved about 2–3 miles per hour. It burned year-round homes and seasonal cottages. The same year, the Ekdahl Church Fire burned along the St. Croix River, near Grantsburg. All three of these fires were uncontrollable. All the men could do was work the edges of them to narrow the burning swath until the fire reached a natural firebreak. Bob was responsible for

*There's an influx of people building homes in the barrens. People with homes in the woods are at risk from fires. They are also potential starters of those fires.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

the fire control program. He moved people in from other DNR programs such as Fisheries to help fight the fire. They worked with the private sector. They pulled in bulldozers to doze lines or driveable breaks around the fire so they could patrol the edges. Bob was on the phone non-stop, calling the counties to ask for bulldozers. He fielded questions from the news media. He met with National Guard officers to set up roadblocks to deal with potential looting. One woman called him and asked, “What should I do?” She was alone with the fire coming down the driveway. He told her to get in the lake.

What has been the impact of these fires on the people who live there? Bob thinks there's a strong awareness of the potential for forest fires. There's good compliance on burning permits. The non-residents, people with summer homes, are more likely to burn their leaves and start fires.

When you hear the sound of scrub oaks exploding in fire, you wonder about the capability of men to control something like that. The most spectacular thing about a fire, when you are driving by or flying over it, is seeing how much damage can happen in such a short time. Everything looks blackened and smoldering. You're dumbfounded by the impact Mother Nature can have on the world.

Yet fire is a part of the ecology of the barrens. Bob supports controlled burning for resource management. He knows DNR staff use burning at Crex Meadows to keep the marshes open and to keep the sharptail habitat open at the Solon Springs Wildlife Area and Namekagon Barrens. “You have to have respect for what fire can do, but it's a cheap tool.”



**Lyndon Arthur Smith**  
*Born: February 1, 1913*

LYNNY FOUGHT FOREST FIRES AND grass fires with shovels and caterpillar tractors. He was a heavy equipment operator. As a mechanic, he worked for the Wisconsin DNR. His job was to fix equipment, so he worked on fire-fighting equipment. Lynny witnessed a fire that burned over 9,000 acres in one season. Before they had tractors to pull plows, he drove horses hauling water to fight fires.

The sound of the fire depended on the wind. But one time he saw a “firestorm,” where the gases from the fuel didn’t burn until they were 100–200 feet in the air. Then there was a big blast of fire. He saw only one of these, northeast of Springbrook. That was scary. It only lasted for a few seconds. He was carrying a backpack can with water that time. He was paying attention to the fire because of the danger. Others saw the firestorm too. It looked like an explosion, though it didn’t sound like the ones on TV; there was a roar. A big fire makes a noise like a strong wind.

Burning gas makes a blue flame; the firestorm was blue. There was a lot of heat there.

Once, Lynny and a group of six or seven older men got lost after fighting a fire. By the time the fire was out, it had gotten dark. The burned area was especially black. Lynny was worried about getting the older fellows home. He felt responsible for them, so he told them he was going and they could come too or stay all night. That motivated them to go with him. At first they were just in the open areas, where there had been grass and ferns. But there was a hardwood ridge along the edge of the open country. The night sky along the ridge seemed familiar. There was a kind of opening ahead of them. Lynny realized he was on the trail he used going to his trapping shack. He didn’t say anything about that, but he got the men out of there. They had to walk all the way to Minong, a good four miles. They were cold and wet from leaking back cans. It gets cold at night.

Lynny has heard people complain that “we don’t have any blueberries any more because we don’t have any forest fires,” but he doesn’t want forest fires on his land. “I know what happens when you keep the forest fires out: it grows good wood, depending on the soil there. I’ve hauled pulpwood from land that’s produced two crops of good jack pine or popple in my lifetime.” Lynny just goes by what he’s seen. He does remember a big forest fire by Brule one time.



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*The men fought forest and grass fires with shovels and backpack water cans.*



**Albert Lorin Lord**

*Born: March 24, 1931*

**Gladys Lord Sampson**

*Born: August 23, 1911*

AL AND HIS AUNT GLADYS, WHO SHARE their Chippewa heritage, said that the town of Solon Springs was originally called White Birch until a fire burned the town in 1900. Gladys said that the fire started from a train. Most of the houses in town were destroyed. Al supposed that people must have gone “back to the tipi.”

*Forest fires still happen,  
but people are careful  
and know what to do.  
A call goes out for  
“stompers and trompers”  
to put the blaze out.*

Al remembered a forest fire that started down at Trego in the early years of the Twentieth Century. There were firebreaks around the lake and around the house, and fortunately the fire didn’t get to the house. His dad helped fight that fire. Al used to walk through the woods and see the burned stumps left by that fire. Al and Gladys said that forest fires still happen, but people are careful and know what to do. A call goes out for “stompers and trompers” to put the blaze out.

About fifteen years before the interview, there was a big fire down in Gordon. They said it wouldn’t jump across the river, but it did. Al said there was a company putting in a sewer right then. They had all the big equipment necessary for fighting

the fire, and they offered to donate the use of the bulldozers. But the DNR wouldn’t let them bulldoze through the plantations because it was private land. “It all burned,” he said. They had the equipment, but they couldn’t put the fire out because they couldn’t go on private land.

Al reminisced that when the Indians were done picking blueberries for the year, they burned the blueberry patch for next year. Now it’s woods. You couldn’t burn there now, though they do still burn part of the bird sanctuary run by Douglas County (Douglas County Wildlife Management Area) each year. Controlled burns are all right. That’s what the Indians did for the blueberries.



*They do still burn part of the bird sanctuary run by Douglas County (Douglas County Wildlife Management Area) each year.*

DNR ARCHIVE



**Kay Ramel Karras**

*Born: June 19, 1918*

**Helen Rein**

*Born: October 9, 1918*

HELEN AND KAY, TWO LONG-TERM friends, shared an interview. Helen lives in Solon Springs, and Kay lives in the little town of Bennett.

Helen remembered a fire fifteen or eighteen years ago that came to the edge of the river. She sat on the porch and watched it come on the other side of the river. She saw flames shoot up over the trees. Her heart was in her throat. Everybody went to fight the fire with wet gunny sacs and brooms. Kay remembered a grass fire by the old Lucius place. People used wet gunny sacs to beat that fire out too. Helen said grass fires travel faster, but forest fires can travel across the treetops.

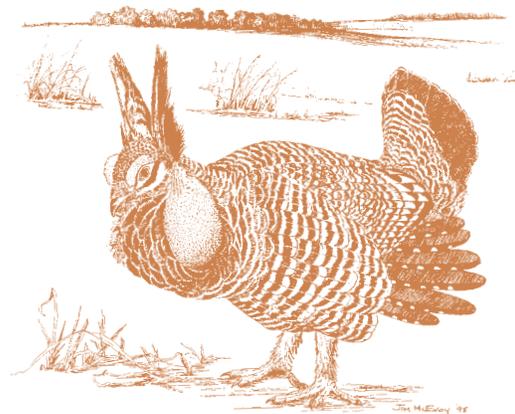
*Helen saw flames  
shoot up over the trees.  
Her heart was in her throat.*

Helen said they have controlled burns at the bird sanctuary (Douglas County Wildlife Management Area). It scared her when she saw the smoke from there initially. Kay explained that they have to wait for the right weather conditions. They burn off all the grass and seeds that the winter birds live off. Helen pointed out that they used to burn in the spring, but then they were burning the nests.

Helen had heard about the Hinckley Fire and the flu of 1918. A lot of people died in that Hinckley Fire. Her dad found burned check stubs from that fire in his field; they had blown all the way from Hinckley, 75 miles away in Minnesota. Kay had read about the Hinckley Fire. It was a disastrous fire; some people were killed.

After working at the defense plant during World War II for a while, Helen did contract work on a mail route: the “Star Route”. While she worked on the mail route, she used to pick up a five-year-old little girl and bring her home and clean her up. That little girl and her brother died in a house fire the following year.

Both Helen and Kay said that, twenty years in the future, they’d like to see the area the same as it is now. Kay likes the bird sanctuary as it is. Helen commented that the burning could be improved upon. Helen said they burn the young trees, and she thinks they should keep replanting the trees they take. Kay explained that biologists burn an area because they don’t want trees; they want open country so the prairie chickens can live there. Either way, she concluded, people who want to change the land should contact the people who live there first.



*Kay explained that biologists burn an area because they don't want trees; they want open country so the prairie chickens can live there.*



**Lafayette Connor**  
*Born: March 29, 1900*

FAYE, WHO SPENT BOTH HIS YOUTH and last years in the Webster area, said fires were a tragedy. Around 1904, his home burned down, and several other people's burned too. Fires were started when people cleared land by burning brush. The farmers all got together to plow furrows to stop the fire. He'd dunk a gunny sac in swamp water to fight the flames. They were at a baseball game when someone told them their house was burning. Faye's dad had \$80 cash he'd made in the logging camp. He kept it in a fruit jar, buried in the basement. When the fire burned down the house, they carried pails of water to put out the embers. The basement was dirt, so they dug the \$80 out all right. The whole family had lived in the logging camp on the St. Croix River that winter to earn that \$80. Faye's mom cried when the house burned; his dad swore. They had made breakfast on an old wood stove, and maybe they had burned some paper that went up the chimney to the tarpaper on the outside of the house. Or maybe the kerosene lantern exploded. There could have been a hole in the metal chimney: they had a stovepipe, not a stone chimney. Faye was only four years old at the time: he just realized all his toys were gone. While the house burning was not part of a wildfire, Faye remembers hearing about one wildfire from before he was born: the Hinckley Fire in Minnesota. Several hundred people died there, he said. The Cloquet Fire, also in Minnesota, occurred around 1918. It was probably started from several sources simultaneously. Faye lost a cousin and his wife in that fire. Claud White, the

cousin, had started a garage fire. The fire got into the swampy area where the peat caught fire; the fire then formed a poisonous gas. The state sent in boxcars to move people out of Cloquet to White Bear, Minnesota, where they set up an army camp. Claud and his wife, who were sick with the flu, died in White Bear, presumably from the flu and the gas from the fire. Their two little boys were adopted by their aunt, a doctor in Chicago.

Faye's comment about controlled burns was that the land would still return to the same thing (such as scrub brush prairie, jack pine forest, blueberry barrens, etc.) whether you burn it or not, but you have to wait longer for it to reach that state if you don't burn it. Fires burn the dead material. When people do a controlled burn, they usually seed later. Faye didn't think pine would ever grow unless someone planted it. He expressed the opinion that conservation measures such as burning and planting trees have done wonders for this part of Wisconsin.



*Sometimes fires had tragic consequences. Fires were started when people cleared land by burning brush or some burning paper went up the stovepipe from the wood stove to the tarpaper on the outside of the house.*



**Dorothy Frosch**

*Born: March 1, 1916*

DOROTHY MOVED FROM LAMONT, Illinois to Wascott, Wisconsin in 1963. She is not happy about controlled fires. "I'm scared because I went through one fire," she said. In 1977, there was a forest fire here, she recalled. Some people were having a bonfire, cooking hot dogs in Spooner, when the fire got away. It reached all the way to Gordon. No one was killed, but sixty-one houses were burned.

Dorothy and her husband, Bill, were eating supper when an airplane flew overhead with a loudspeaker, telling everyone to get out. So everyone did. She threw her important papers in the car and grabbed some clothes to wear to work. For some reason, she grabbed her husband's oldest, greasiest clothes. Dorothy went to the neighbor's to see if she had a way out, but the neighbor was already gone. She wanted to wait for Bill, but the cops told her to leave. She went to a lookout place, but she had to leave there too. She went to the tavern by highways T and 35. It was about midnight, and the fellow at the tavern wouldn't even make the refugees a cup of coffee: "It's closing time; get out!"

She drove to Moose Junction. She needed gas in the car, but all she had was \$1.68 in her pocket. (Since then, she never lets the gas tank go under half-full.) Dorothy's neighbor was following her. The neighbor threw her baking in the car, and that's all she took with her. They stopped at the post office on the corner of 53 and T, and they finally got a cup of coffee at Audrey's. At least they had the neighbor's rolls.

Dorothy thought her house had been burnt out, but her main concern was not knowing where Bill was. It was around 4:00 a.m. when a DNR man let her go home. Bill was still there. He'd backfired the hill when the fire was coming in. That saved the house. Men from Minong came with tanks on their backs. They sprayed the fire.

*The fire was so hot it leveled the neighbor's house.*

The fire was so hot it leveled the neighbor's house to the ground. You wouldn't even have known she had had a stove or refrigerator there. The appliances were completely melted.

Back at her place, Dorothy went on patrol. She walked around with a shovel and put out any smoldering she found. She couldn't talk for a couple of days she was so shaken. She sent Bill to bed though, and she continued fighting the fire he'd never left.

No, Dorothy doesn't like fire. But apparently the neighbors liked living there, because they rebuilt their house instead of moving away. Dorothy doesn't want to move anywhere else either. Since Bill died, her family keeps trying to convince her to move back where she grew up, but she says, "No way!"



**William Soderbeck**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Alice Johnson Soderbeck**

*Born: October 6, 1914*

BOTH BILL AND ALICE GREW UP IN THE Grantsburg area. Bill remembered the smoke from the Cloquet-Moose Lake Fire in Minnesota in 1918. Alice remembers the reflection of the fire in the sky. She lived on a hill and could see a long way. The sky was red reflecting the fire fifty miles away. A neighbor's daughter who lived near Cloquet dug a hole in the ground to survive the fire. Her hair was scorched afterwards. People went into the lake to survive.

Now you look up at the sky like that and you just see the lights of the Twin Cities reflected there. Alice saw a mirage of the small town of Siren reflected in the sky one time. Bill remembered a time he saw a black sky with a moon shining bright as day. Once he saw a pale colored rainbow at 1:00 a.m., but none of these unusual skies appear to have been related to fire.

When there was a fire in those days, they stopped it with backfire. Now you can't do that because you're not permitted to start a fire. In those days nobody ever lost their buildings because you could backfire. Today controlled burns help keep the brush down. The DNR uses controlled burns sometimes when they are working to get the timber out and bring back prairie in the area. Norm Stone, the first manager at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, did a lot; he started the controlled burning regime there.

Alice loved coming to her grandparents' place when she was a kid. She and Bill live there now. "This house is over 100 years old!" It almost burned down one time. Lightening hit it three times.

They had a party telephone line back in those days. Frances Lee was on the line, and Alice called for help. The firefighters went to the wrong house, but the neighbors had heard what was happening. "That party line was a life saver!" When you heard the phone ring in that kind of weather, you knew something was wrong. Alice saved her desk of papers and her new pressure cooker from the fire. (It cost \$19, and that was a lot then.) Usually the road worked as a firebreak.



*Norm Stone, the first manager of Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, started the controlled burning regime there.*

COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



**Betty Donis Lockert Hanson**

*Born: January 18, 1934*

BETTY GREW UP IN THE RURAL FISH Lake area. She said they used to clean up the woods and remove the slash when trees were cut, but now, after a clearcut, you can hardly walk through an area to pick blueberries without stumbling. Controlled burning needs to be controlled, but, if you hit it just right after a burn, you can find wonderful blueberry patches. That's what it takes to get good blueberries. Betty said she'd like some burning near her for this reason, in spite of some frightening experiences she has had with fires.

*Betty remembers winter bonfires at the lake.*

Betty's family didn't have electricity until 1954, so they lit candles on the Christmas tree. One time her sister's hair got too close to the candles and caught on fire. Her mother smothered the fire with a towel and poured water on the sister's head.

One January day it was 35° below zero. Betty's brother had perfect attendance so he was given the money to take the train to high school. But it was so cold that Betty and her sisters stayed home. Their parents took the cream to town and left the girls home alone, with no phone. That was the day of the chimney fire.

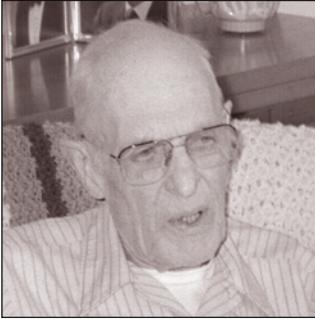
The girls heard the roar of the fire, and they saw the smoke and flames. Muriel and Mavis, Betty's older sisters, took off for the neighbor's, to use the phone to call for help. Little Betty put her coat on and followed them. She ran up and down the

road looking for her sisters, who cut through the field. Even through the fields, it was a mile and a half to the neighbor's house. The snow in the field was knee-deep—too deep for Betty to negotiate. The remaining sister, Mermie, pumped water in the kitchen, ran upstairs, and threw the water in the chimney. It was a brick chimney, but there was a round hole upstairs where you could attach a stovepipe. Mermie removed the cover from the hole and, straddling the bedpost, poured the water down the chimney as fast as she could. In one instant, she saw her own face reflected in the mirror, and it was screaming.

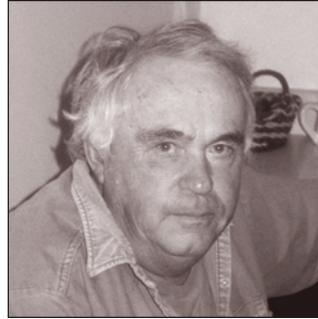
Meanwhile, the neighbor, Art Shogren, heard Muriel and Mavis screaming as they were coming across the woods. He observed to his wife that "the wild cats" were coming, and he threatened to get his gun. Mavis froze her hands in the cold dash to get help, and she was swearing because the neighbor wasn't hurrying. When Art came walking up, Betty ran ahead of him, trying to hurry him.

By the time they got back to the house, the fire in the chimney was out, and the house was cold because there was no fire in the stove. Mermie lay on the bed, shivering. Mavis was the one who had to go to the hospital that night, but it wasn't because she got burned. She had a pencil in her hand and it got frozen there.

Betty also remembers winter bonfires at the lake. Her mother would make a level spot on the ice with a shovel and they'd build a fire. They'd all go skating. Once you did all the work to build the fire, you'd stay there a long time, and then you'd really need the warmth of the fire.



**William R. Mason**  
Born: September 8, 1923



**Walter (Buck) Follis**  
Born: June 6, 1939

BILL MOVED TO THE AREA IN 1933.

During the Great Depression years it was very dry. People had to go fight wildfires with a bucket of water and a gunny sac. You'd soak the sac, then beat the fire out with it. Some of the men had backpacks with water. The fire would usually burn to the road, then stop.

Bill said burning helps the blueberries. He figured controlled burning might be a good idea to clear off the meadows, but you don't want to burn the timber. The meadows used to be used for hay, but now they're just swamps, Bill said. Maybe burning would help protect against fire danger.

When he was a kid, Bill burned brush as part of his play in the woods and fields. He made a locomotive out of a big cream can and put a stovepipe in it. Then he built a fire and set the can on the rocks by it. He kept feeding wood to it, especially green sticks to make the smoke. I guess it's fair to say he played with fire.



*During the Great Depression years it was very dry. People had to fight wildfires with a bucket of water and a gunny sac.*

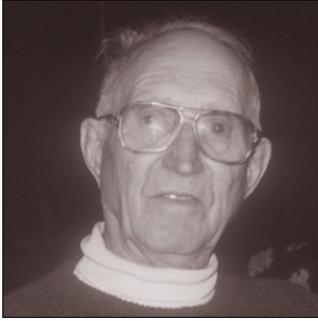
BUCK LIVES NORTH OF BRULE, WHICH is the French word for burnt. Around 1936, a lot of the land and homesteads around Brule burned. The government relocated a lot of these families to better land. Each family was given 40 acres with the houses in the center sharing one well. These places were called "relocation homes". They were near Mason.

For a while there was open country because of the fires. But after all the fires the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) and WPA (Works Progress Administration) came through with reforestation efforts. The Wisconsin DNR is doing firebreaks and managing for sharp-tailed grouse now. Buck would like to see some of this countryside kept open with prescribed burns, though he does appreciate logging too. As the countryside is opened up, it gets more prairie grasses, wildflowers, and songbirds.

Buck remembers big fires around the 1970s. Because of those fires, jack pines, with their serotinous cones (serotinous cones depend on fire to open them for seed dispersal), are thick, west of Minong across Highway T, almost to Gordon. In the Five Mile Fire of 1977, a lot of homes were lost. Buck ran a tractor with a plow to help put out the fire.

About 15 years ago, high school students from Superior and Duluth were having graduation parties in the barrens. They would light a bonfire and burn whatever was around them. No doubt these celebrations increased the risk of wildfires there.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN



**Lowell Donald Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*

ONE OF LOWELL'S EARLY MEMORIES IN the Northwest Sands Area, where he grew up, was frightening, and it was associated with fire. In 1926, when he was eight years old, he heard a fire siren for the first time. He brought the cattle home when he heard it. He's always been afraid of sirens. He sees controlled burning as necessary. But once when he was burning a swamp, the fire got out of control. He didn't want to leave the fire long enough to call for help, but he set a backfire to control it. He was frightened that time.

One time in the fall, when he was in high school, Lowell could see red sky in the evening, up on Highway F, about four miles north of Grantsburg. It was a fire. He couldn't help. The smoke on the road was so bad he could hardly see. Apparently someone was haying on Crex Meadows, and a hot exhaust pipe may have started the fire.

The last bad fire Lowell remembers in the area was in 1980. People who had their lawns cut short were able to save their houses. But so many people build their houses among the trees, where the fire trucks can't get in, that the danger of fire is very real. If people build out there, they should make the roads wide enough for fire control.

Now you need a permit to burn or you get a summons. Lowell has no objection to controlled burns. Without them, there would be a bigger problem than ever.

*One time the smoke on the road was so bad Lowell could hardly see. If people build out there, they should make the roads wide enough for fire controls.*



**Marjorie Martell Tutor**

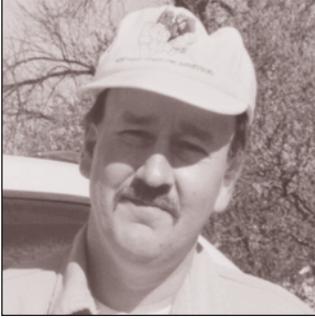
*Born: January 15, 1912*

MARGIE, WHO LIVED MOST OF HER life around Iron River, recalled a fire around 1918. She called it the "Duluth Fire" but said it wasn't officially called that. She remembers seeing cars full of burnt people who had been caught in the fire, their hands baked right to the steering wheel. She wasn't allowed to cross the street. She remembers that part well. She thinks they were taking the dead bodies into a funeral home. Some people survived by going to one field and lying there, where it was burned enough around that they could escape the fire. The fire didn't come where she lived at the time.

In Margie's estimation, controlled burns are acceptable as long as they are well controlled. Once, when she was young, a fire got away near her big log house. She wasn't allowed to go home from school, but she could see the fire coming.



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



**Philip Theodore Stromberg**

*Born: October 27, 1953*

PHIL IS A FOREST RANGER WHO currently works at the Ranger Station in Webster. He is very interested in both the ecology of fire and fire prevention. “When you’ve seen a large, tragic fire, you’re more likely to want to prevent fires.” He said that people in this community are very respectful of fire. “We talk of the need for fire to be returned to the land, but people expect their little parcels to be protected.”

In the late 1800s the Hinckley and Peshtigo fires were fires of such magnitude that they gave rise to fire protection in an organized way, to protect lives and property. In the early 1900s people like Guifford Pinchot (1865-1946), considered one of the founders of the conservation movement and America’s first professionally trained forester, recognized that forestry wouldn’t be successful until fire was dealt with. But people didn’t care about forestry much at the time. Trees were just in the way of the plow. Even the first chief forester (In 1904, S. M. Griffith was hired as the first State Forester) was run out of the state. But people did buy into fire protection. Organized forest fire protection began to be practiced in 1911. An emergency fire warden was appointed. A forest ranger was assigned to a large area to

supervise volunteer fire wardens who went out with a crew. They all got paid when they fought a fire. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps crews erected fire towers and ranger stations. The system of fire protection we use today began in the 1930s. A half-million acres burned annually in Wisconsin prior to 1940. In 1980, large fires burned 20,000 acres, but mostly only about 3,000–5,000 acres burn annually now.

With an increasing urban interface, 1976–77 was a hallmark year for large fires. More and more homes are being built in the woodlands where fire used to be part of the ecology. Previously there wasn’t a serious amount of structures to be burned, and fires merely went around the fields. The Five Mile Fire of 1977, in the northwest barrens, burned many homes in Washburn and Douglas counties. With all the recreational homes in wildlands and along shorelines, a new problem arose: educating the public to prevent fires and getting people to reduce potential fuel, such as brush, that might build up around their houses.

Ecologically the barrens is a natural fire ecosystem. It burned before Europeans settled here, and fire helped create the shape of the barrens. The sandy soil of the barrens doesn’t retain moisture well and is drought prone. Thus the sandy soil has contributed to the occurrence of fire in the area. Fire in the barrens is episodic in nature. Prairies tend to have three- to five-year intervals of fire; barrens have fifteen- to twenty-year intervals; and areas with heavy soils tend to have forty-, fifty-, or even eighty- to one-hundred-year intervals. Fire is a natural and frequent part of the barrens ecosystem.



*In the early 1900s, conservationists like Guifford Pinchot recognized that forestry wouldn’t be successful without fire management. The system of fire protection we use today began in the 1930s.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Now there are jack and red pines and wooden houses in what used to be savanna. People should be aware that they have built their homes in harm's way.*

Fire exclusion is needed to protect people's property now. And because we've excluded fire from the area, fuels have been allowed to develop. Now there are jack and red pine and wooden houses in what used to be savanna. Previously, light burns shaped the environment, but now with fire exclusion practices, when a fire does occur, it is likely to be of a more devastating force. So the fires occurring in the barrens now are not really replicating the fires that existed before. People should be aware that they have built their homes in harm's way.

In 1960, Neil Le May said, "We've solved the forest problem," because forest fires were greatly reduced. But more and more homes were built in the woods in the 1970s, where fire used to be part of the ecology. Now the challenge is to communicate with people to get them to make their homes defensible.

Phil started his first ranger position in 1977. Because of the Ekdahl Fire in 1980, he says he was "baptized by fire" early on in the job. The Ekdahl Fire burned over 4,000 acres and thirty-five structures, though most of these may have been hunting shacks. The fire was started by two people cutting firewood. The cause was generally attributed to smoking at the time, but, in retrospect, carbon from the chainsaw was the probable cause. The people who started the fire called it in to the fire department around 12:30 p.m. At the Ranger Station, Phil responded to the long, steady ring. The fire was about six miles north of the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area headquarters. The fire department truck came in right behind him as he



SUSAN GILCHRIST

saw the fire burning in the slash. The fire, which was moving northeast, was very hot and reaching large fire heights. Two acres were already burning. Two tractors responded to the call. One went up the right flank of the fire, and one went up the left. But the fire jumped the tractor's furrow on the right. Phil called the tractor operator, but the person didn't answer, and Phil feared for the operator's safety. But the operator was okay; he'd continued across the road. Again Phil heard the fire had jumped the tractor's furrow, and again he tried to call, but the radio didn't work well. Two times he thought he'd lost the man, but he didn't. Meanwhile, the guy on the left flank almost was lost. He was entering a dense red pine plantation that provided a heavy fuel ladder for the fire. Overrun by the fire, that operator had to abandon the tractor. He burned his hand, but managed to escape. The tractor was burned over, but later repaired. Phil continued up the right flank. The forward progress of the fire was stopped by the river and the flanking action. The fire was contained by around 7:00 in the evening. It did not jump across the St. Croix River, though it did burn an island in the river.

In about six hours of fire, over 4,000 acres were burned. In the wake of the Ekdahl Fire, there was a citizen outcry. A fifteen million-dollar lawsuit was launched against Phil, the DNR, Nekoosa Edwards who owned the land, and the

**Philip Theodore Stromberg** *(continued)*

two men who started the fire. A man whose son was a lawyer lost a hunting shack in the fire and generated a class action suit. Permanent homeowners joined the suit. When the judge threw out the class action suit, the individual pursued the case. The suit said the DNR failed to prevent and put out the fire. Eventually the judge dismissed the DNR from the case. The public outcry led to the creation of a Governor's Task Force to study fire in Wisconsin and efforts to generate communications with the public regarding fire. Fire prevention became a big part of Phil's career. We can't prevent every fire, but we can extend the interval between fires.

Phil likes to describe the episodic nature of fire to people. If you make a timeline with major fires, you will see fifteen to twenty year intervals, he says. After the major burn of the Ekdahl Fire, there were two droughty years in Wisconsin in 1987–88. There was a fire in Douglas County, but it only burned 600 acres, and it was the largest fire in Wisconsin that year. Prevention may push apart the intervals, but fire will return to the landscape. People building in remote areas are placing themselves in harm's way. If we want to remove fire from the landscape, the alternative for keeping open spaces for those species requiring full sun is commercial logging.

The technology of fighting fires has changed a lot over the past twenty years, largely with the advent of helicopters and planes used to fight fires. In 1980, after two large back-to-back fires (the Ekdahl and Oak Lake fires), helicopters were made available for fighting fires in that part of the

state. Phil said that they can manage one large fire relatively well, but a second occurring at the same time would undo them. Yet the potential for having multiple large fires at once exists.

Today we've evolved to an Incident Command System, or ICS, which is a large, national, organized way of managing large fires, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes. The latest technology is the single engine air tanker. The huge yellow

*If you make a timeline with major fires, you will see fifteen to twenty year intervals, Phil says.*



*A likely cause of future fires will be power lines. Phil promotes clearing the power line right-of-way.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Many fires, about a third of them, are caused by debris burning, in spite of the fact that such burning is a highly regulated practice.*

plane can be loaded with 600 gallons of water. It drops water on the fire, returns to the airport to fill up again, and repeats the effort.

A likely cause of future fires will be power lines. In 1998, Phil knew of forty-five power line fires that happened in three hours. But it was early in the season and the cold temperature and rain helped to curtail the fires. In 1998, the Bergin Fire and the Springbrook Fires each burned about 120 acres. That was the first year power lines caused fires of that size. Phil promotes clearing the power line right-of-way. A tree could fall on the wire and lead to a fire that would kill all the trees.

Phil also spoke of working with volunteer fire companies. In the 1920s the statutes were written so the DNR was responsible for forest fires. Most communities didn't have fire departments

then. DNR is held statutorily responsible for structure protection incidental to forest fires. Since 1980, the department has come light years in working with volunteer fire departments. In 1980, Phil fought the Ekdahl fire using a snowmobile trail map; today there's a structural map showing townships, with colored dots indicating where the houses are.

Phil thinks we're getting a more focused and effective fire prevention education to the public. If you get a building permit, the forest ranger gets a copy. Then he sends a welcome letter with recommendations for fire safety, such as wide driveway access, and information about required burning permits. Many fires, about a third of them, are caused by debris burning, in spite of the fact that such burning is a highly regulated practice. When it's too dangerous to burn debris, the permits are shut down.

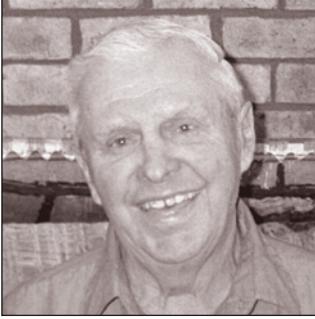
Phil is not involved in prescribed burns. He said you're not allowed to burn on fuel breaks in Burnett County though, because of the Karner blue butterflies. (You would need an incidental take permit.) With prescribed burning, the lupine, on which the Karner blue caterpillar depends, flourishes.

The debate goes on as to whether we should use clearcutting and prescribed burning to restore the barrens at the expense of ongoing timber production. If we didn't care if we cut any timber, it would be one thing, but we all use paper and wood!



COURTESY OF GREX MEADOWS

*With prescribed burning, the lupine on which the Karner blue butterfly caterpillar depends, flourishes.*



**Russell Lester Connor**  
*Born: March 1, 1923*

DURING THE TERRIBLE HEAT AND drought of the Great Depression, Russ drove into the barrens with his dad on a fishing trip. He could smell smoke and see it in the air. There was a fire out there. It was 100° that day in June. He returned to the same place a few weeks later and stopped on top of the steel bridge on the Namekagon. As far as the eye could see towards Minong, there was a solid, black, burned desert. It looked like a moonscape. The ruts in the road were filled with black ash. Like totem poles every quarter mile or so, the stubs of burned trees stuck up. There was no trout fishing that day; they had to get away from the sun and the heat. The fire missed nothing. But many hawks perched on those dead stumps. Nature knows all the tricks, including regrowth after fire.

*Like totem poles  
every quarter mile or so,  
the stubs of burned trees  
stuck up.*



**Alexander (Ike)  
Louis Gokee**  
*Born: December 29, 1918*

IKE GREW UP IN RED CLIFF AND WAS living there at the time of the interview. In the 1930s, Ike went out to the barrens to fight a fire one time. He put his name down some place on a paper. But his dad had the same name, and maybe he got paid instead, because Ike never did. He used a shovel to fight that fire. “A bunch of us went out in a big flatbed truck. There was lots of smoke. You had to watch out.” They put out the fire around the edge. That way it burns itself out in the middle. He’d throw dirt on the fire to smother it.

*They put out the fire  
around the edge. That way  
it burns itself out  
in the middle.*

Changes in the sand country? Ike says there’s not much blueberrying in the barrens any more. You can’t find the blueberries like before. Someone plowed and planted trees in there. The disturbance made the berry plants grow, but after a few years they died out. “You’ve got to burn a blueberry patch to help the seeds bust out,” he said. There’s a blueberry marsh at Lamont’s Farm, about nine miles from Ike’s place. Ike used to camp out there. “They used to burn that blueberry marsh.”



**Catherine Jones Strharsky**

*Born: October 6, 1922*

**Joseph Strharsky**

*Born: August 14, 1923*

KATIE AND JOE LIVE IN IRON RIVER. Asked about changes in the land, Katie said she thought controlled burning is great because of the potash. Joe echoed her: "We used to have fires. They sweetened the soil with potash." Then there were more berries. The drought in the twenties and thirties resulted in many fires. Such a fire meant more berries. Katie said they've put in some better roads now, fire roads.

In the 1930s, a fire came near Katie's house. One member of each family had to go fight the fire. Her dad had to go.

Joe remembered carrying buckets of water on his back, shovels, and squirt cans. He was a member of the CCC, so every other weekend he was on call for fires. In an emergency, they'd pick up anybody walking on the road to help fight the fire. Katie pointed out it was a good thing there were no houses around then.



**Nora Searles**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Harold Searles**

*Born: September 13, 1911*

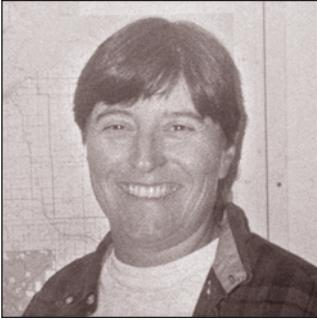
HAROLD AND NORA OPERATED A cranberry bog near Webster for many years. They said they neither burned nor worried about fires there. "The DNR takes good care of fires," they said. However, when Nora was a child, her father burned on their own farmland every year. He did this for the blueberry crop.

*Harold and Nora  
neither burned nor worried  
about fires at their cranberry  
bog near Webster.*



STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

*During the Great Depression years it was very dry. People had to fight wildfires with a bucket of water and a gunny sac.*



**Joyce Zifco**

*Born: October 27, 1953*

AS A FIREFIGHTER IN THE WASHBURN Ranger Station, Joyce has seen a lot of fires. At one point, she decided to work on wildland fires out west, but the district manager told her “women don’t do those things.” It was a big challenge for the men to accept that she wanted to go. It was okay for her to be part of the district crew, but she was not included when the men went out west to fight fires. They were trying to protect her because she was a woman.

About five years later she was able to go, when other women also expressed interest in fighting fires in western states. The logistics were pretty amazing: packing a red pack, being bused around, riding in a deuce and a half (an army truck with an open back), and living in a camp with a few hundred people. Joyce spent seven months in a hotshot crew in California. (Initially established by the National Park Service in the western states in 1981, hotshot crews are mobile and highly skilled teams trained for all phases of wildfire suppression.) The crew was self-sufficient: they could do rappelling, fire ignition, whatever they needed to do.

Joyce has continued to progress in her career. Now she’s fire manager for the district. She does all the prescribed burn planning and staffing, and she organizes all the spring burns. She also specializes in “helitech crew.” She works with helicopters that are used for transporting personnel and for suppressing fire by dropping water from water buckets that are hooked underneath the helicopter. Joyce has to do weight calculations so the helicopter doesn’t get overloaded.

Joyce is an ignition specialist, using a hand device for lighting fires and for backfiring operations on the ground. As an ignition specialist, she leads people to do a fast burnout. It’s essential in her job that she knows the weather conditions to understand how the fire is likely to burn. In Washington State, Joyce worked on a fire in which over 300,000 acres were burning. As leader of the burn crew, she chose the people she wanted to work with. While the fire department was hosing houses in an attempt to save them from the blaze, she and her crew burned areas around some of the houses to clear away potential fuel and prevent the fire from coming close to the houses. The crew had to be very careful of power lines while they were conducting the burns. When she pulled off her face-mask, people were surprised to see that a woman was leading the burn crew. In her willingness to take risks herself, Joyce has saved a lot of other people’s homes.

*The risk of fire increases with every new house, every burn barrel, every burning debris pile, every power line.*

Firefighters have died in wildfires. Fortunately, Joyce has never had to do a “tent pull,” which is a last ditch effort for protection if a fire threatens to overtake a firefighter. You pull the fire shelter around you like a pup tent in an area where

*Generally people don't realize that picking blueberries is a benefit of burning, but you can get a good crop of berries if you burn every two years.*



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

there's no burning material, quickly dig a small hole, and put your face in the hole to protect it. You can get in these "tents" or shelters in 23 seconds or less.

In 1999, the year Joyce was interviewed, there was a fire in the Moquah Barrens that burned about 300 acres north of Highway Z and east of Iron River. The fire was probably caused by a downed wire. The year before the interview, an ATVer's fire burned 65 acres in the McGuinness Lake Fire. A natural swamphole helped to stop it. Even though the water table was low, they were able to corral the fire. Some ATVers like to have a campfire and a party, so the U.S. Forest Service has to check the area, monitor for hot coals, and extinguish fires.

Joyce says they're trying to use fire as a management tool in the barrens. They're getting away from the furrow planting they used to do after a clearcut. Furrowing leaves scars on the land. Moquah Barrens has obvious scars from over the years. Joyce pointed out that fire creates benefits for wildlife such as badgers, bluebirds, thirteen-lined ground squirrels, and sharp-tailed grouse. "People don't realize the seed source that's been stored in the duff for many years," she said, referring to the layer of decaying leaves and branches that covers the forest floor. Also, burning opens the land up for the blueberries. She has noticed more cars bringing people out to the barrens to pick blueberries. She's asked some of the berry pickers survey-type questions and found that while some people know what prescribed burning is about, others don't like burning. Generally, people didn't

realize that picking blueberries was a benefit of burning. She suggested that they do a little research test of their own: look for blueberries in the woods compared to in open areas.

In 1999, there was a bumper crop of blueberries; some people picked 50–70 quarts. The blackberries were good that year too. Joyce says that you can get a good crop of berries if you burn every two years.

In the late 1970s and early '80s, forest managers didn't have the resources to conduct burns, so herbicide was used to knock back the brush. A mechanical method was also tried in which a big roller chopper was pulled behind a small dozer to chop down the vegetation. Now the tendency is to introduce fire to the ecosystem, since it is a more natural tool. Joyce favors a burn program and letting trees come back on their own, rather than cultivating them. If people want the land to stay the same, they need a burn program, she says.

Joyce doesn't think a lot of people are comfortable with burning under pine stands. But pines kill competitors around them because of the acidity of the needles. "We're in the forefront," she said, "trying different things." Joyce likes these different patterns in the landscape.

As the barrens gets more urbanized, with more development around the lakes, utility lines are the "in" thing to plant now, instead of trees. The risk of fire increases with every new house, every burn barrel, every burning debris pile, every power line. Waterholes help in putting fires out, but it's harder to corral the fire when the water table is low.



**Matt Welter**  
Born: May 31, 1965

**Joyce Zifco** *(continued)*

Joyce referred to a research project related to fire. Dr. Alan Haney, from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, proposed burning a 50-acre stand of mixed oak, hardwood, popple, and jack pine, and comparing it to an open pine barrens that was clearcut previously to a shrub stage across the road. The burn didn't actually kill the mature trees but it did alter the vegetation on the ground. The burn removed a lot of the "ladder fuels" (the lower limbs of the trees) and allowed a lot more sunlight into the ground. Reseeded grasses, ferns, and blueberries came in.

We tend to burn to get to the grass and wildflowers of the prairie, but pine barrens in Moquah comes to the brushy stage with a greater variety of vegetation. Three to six foot bushy oaks make great nesting for sharptails and songbirds. We've gotten away from burning down to the grass.



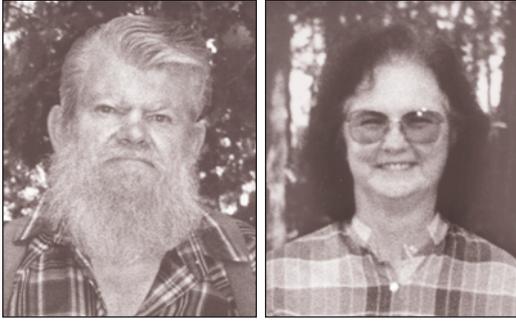
COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*Joyce favors a burn program and letting the trees come back on their own, rather than cultivating them.*

MATT ONCE WORKED IN THE Raspberry Island Lighthouse in the Apostle Islands. He learned a little about how a fire affected light house keepers in the area. In the early 1910s, soon after the cutover, there was a drought. A million acres across northern Wisconsin burned. The smoke was so thick from this fire that the lighthouse keepers in the Apostle Islands had to run their fog signals. Some were even recruited to fight the fire.

*In the early 1910s, a million acres across northern Wisconsin burned.*

Matt wishes there'd be more just "letting it grow." The jack pine patches should be more surrounded by areas that have been opened periodically by burns. He would like to see the area "let go more naturally" instead of cut so frequently. Matt explained how jack pine is the eastern equivalent of ponderosa pine: it periodically needs to be burned to reproduce. Blueberries also thrive after burning. It's hot and dry in the barrens—it can catch on fire easily. By 10:00 a.m. you'd never know that the fields had been "drenched with dew" at dawn. Matt would like to see people let the spontaneous burns go; for example, let every one out of ten burns go.



**Milton Herman Aronson**

*Born: December 29, 1939*

**Eleanor Bistram Aronson**

*Born: November 10, 1942*

MILT AND ELEANOR LIVE IN A HOME IN the woods around Grantsburg now. But they lived in St. Paul, Minnesota for a while, on the second floor of a three-story apartment building. One day, the building caught on fire. They were sleeping when someone threw a Molotov cocktail into the downstairs hallway. The smell of smoke woke them up. Milt dropped Eleanor and the kids from their apartment window; a man who lived in the apartment below caught them. Milt had to argue with Eleanor to convince her to let him drop the kids out. The youngest was just six weeks old, and the oldest was about five and a half. Milt threw the smallest one out first. When he threw Eleanor out, she only had a nightgown on. Then Milt threw out a mattress and jumped out himself, hoping to land on the mattress. But the mattress sailed in the wind, and he hit concrete. He suffered broken hips and wrists and was in the hospital for five and a half months. The woman in the third-story apartment held her two little kids out the window until firemen could rescue them. Milt and Eleanor's oldest girl had nightmares about big black snakes, inspired by the fire hoses she'd seen. The police never did catch anyone.

The Ekdahl Fire occurred in 1980. About a half-mile north of the Aronsons' house, a couple of

fellows were cutting wood with a chainsaw when sparks caught the grass on fire. It burned some homes and the church, but the fire went in the other direction from their house. When Eleanor heard about it, she came home to see if the house was okay. She packed important papers and clothes for the kids in the car in case she had to make a fast get-away.

What about prescribed burns? Eleanor is concerned that when people burn in the spring, ducks and geese are already laying eggs. "Inevitably something will get burned." No one could burn across the road from their house recently because of Karner blue butterflies there. However, Eleanor expects they'll burn there again and harvest some trees where the butterflies are. She doesn't like to see it all black after a burn, but "it turns green and comes back."

*Eleanor doesn't like to see the ground all black after a burn, but "it turns green and comes back."*



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Francis Lampella**

*Born: December 2, 1919*

FRANCIS, WHO GREW UP IN THE Finnish community, spoke of fire in relation to blueberries. “They do a controlled burn to get the blueberries back,” he said. When you burn with close surveillance, the berries come back. Francis thinks we should do that more here. Now days you can’t even burn trash; it’s too risky.

Francis knew about one horrendous fire in the area. It was summertime so he thought maybe lightning caused it. They didn’t have men in a tower watching for fires then. They got the Washburn Tower in the 1930s. They built the 100-foot tower so you could climb it in the summer to report smoke from a distance. His friend worked in the tower.

*“Now man is the manager rather than nature, though nature supersedes man.”*



**Clarence Arthur Wistrom**

*Born: January 18, 1909*

ALTHOUGH CLARENCE MOSTLY TALKED about fishing and water-related issues, he did say that, in his years of working for the old Wisconsin Conservation Department and, later, the DNR, he saw some large fires. He thinks the DNR has established an excellent fire control system. “We lost some timber, but there’s been very little loss of life or damage to buildings. Fires are well controlled.” He went on to say that fires have improved some areas that supported populations of sharp-tailed grouse. The fire opened up the area and provided habitat the sharptails needed.



**Judith Pratt-Shelley**

*Born: January 24, 1959*

JUDY SPOKE FROM HER OFFICE AT Tribal Headquarters in Red Cliff. From her perspective, prescribed burning is necessary. In the past, burning was used to promote blueberry growth, and it could help manage the forest to prevent a giant fire that could wipe out everyone. “Now man is the manager rather than nature, though nature supersedes man.”

# Water



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*When the new spring leaves on the popples were the size of a dime, the smelt and suckers would come. Mike would make beach fires to draw the smelt towards the light. He used to catch a lot of smelt until people from the cities came with nets and seines.*

*Russ' grandfather walked through the area in 1863, saw the rivers and beautiful lakes and homesteaded on Connor Lake.*

*Russ could have stayed in Hawaii, where the army took him, but he chose to return to the sand country, to get back to the rivers and lakes.*

Water



FOIT

# Water



*The Northwest Sands Area is blessed with a wealth of pure water people appreciate for scenic beauty, recreation, drinking, and survival. With the influx of people to the area, lakeshore development is a key issue.*

**T**he Northwest Sands Area features a myriad of little lakes, rivers, and streams, with the majestic shoreline of Lake Superior skirting the northern horizon, just beyond the margin of the area. The lakes for recreation and the quality of the water in the land are part of what draws people to the barrens. You can't think about a whole ecosystem without considering the water resources there, so it is no surprise that interviewees talked about water sometimes, even if the questions weren't aimed in that direction.

Some people initially came to the area for fishing or hunting waterfowl. Some people remembered leisurely summers spent swimming. There are memories about harvesting wild rice in September, or using water to facilitate the harvesting of cranberries later in the fall, then harvesting blocks of ice in the winter.

People talked about the building of dams and dikes at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. They remembered the old-time ferries that carried people and their vehicles across the open water.

More and more people have come to the area since those early days before the highways, and lakeshore development is one of the key issues facing the people in the Northwest Sands Area. Some people put in a plea for the prevention of pollution and the maintenance of pure water quality. Whether for scenic beauty, recreation, occupation, or just to drink for survival, people do seem to appreciate the water in the sand country.



**Sena Borup Christopherson**

*Born: November 26, 1941*

**Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**

*Born: July 11, 1934*

AT ONE TIME BUDDY LIVED IN WHAT IS now Phantom Lake, but it became all water in 1948 when the conservation people bought the land and diked it. (Apparently Norm Stone, the first manager at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, insisted there'd be a lake there if they put in the dikes. This seemed incredible to a lot of people, as they saw no water there. The workers put in the dikes, and the area filled up with water. As if out of nowhere, the lake appeared. That's why they call it Phantom Lake.)

Buddy's dad worked on the dikes around Crex Meadows. He pushed sand up out of the swamp, hauled in fill, and graveled the top. Buddy also helped build dikes around the same time men landed on the moon; dikes were built from the mid-1940s into the early 1970s. He found some remnants from the Crex Carpet Company when he was building dikes—remnants of the blacksmith's shop and cooking and sleeping shacks on the west end of the refuge (Crex Meadows Wildlife Area). Buddy says the dikes are fine. They flood and kill off some timber sometimes. Norm Stone

said it was necessary to clear half a mile from the water to protect adult duck nests from predators, when they were putting in the dikes.

Buddy appreciates the fact that DNR owns much of the land; otherwise private individuals would own it, and it would be essentially gone. But some people felt shoved out of their land by the scare tactic threat to flood them out.

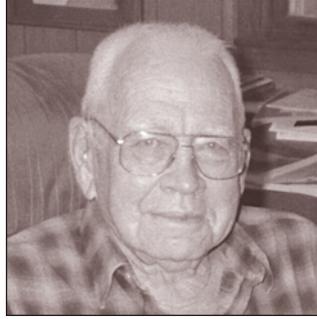
Buddy talked about swimming in the Clam River before the steep sand cliff (the "beach") was covered with all the cut trees that ruined the swimming area. He said there also used to be sturgeon there.

Sena, Buddy's wife, says she's done a lot of canoeing and gathering wild rice. The last few years she's riced on Phantom Lake, which is seeded. The first time she went ricing, she went with friends. Sena described how you go ricing in a canoe. The "beater" sits in front and pulls the rice stalks over the canoe with one stick, then gently taps or "beats" the rice with the other stick to get the grain to fall off the stalks and

*The workers put in the dikes from the mid-1940s through the early 1970s.*



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



**Raymond Bergerson**  
*Born: March 4, 1913*

into the canoe. The “poler” stands behind the beater, poling the canoe onward. Buddy does the poling, and Sena does the beating. Once when she went ricing with a friend named Sue Foster, Sena tried being the poler. She went over backwards into the water, and her friend never knew she’d left. Buddy came back to rescue her when he heard a blood-curdling cry. It was cold and muddy in the water, which was about 10 feet deep. She had her lifejacket on, which was a good thing, because she doesn’t swim.

Once you put rice in the bottom of the canoe, Sena explained, you get worms and spiders all over too. After you’ve gathered the rice, you put it on a canvas to dry. Someone parches the rice for her and Buddy. It cooks faster than store-bought “wild” rice.

Sena doesn’t go ricing any more. A year before the interview, Buddy lost the “duckbill” somewhere in the lake. The duckbill is the metal piece, shaped like a duck’s bill, on the bottom of the push pole. It spreads out and keeps the pole from sinking infinitely deep in the lake bottom.



*Sena says she’s done a lot of canoeing and gathering wild rice.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF GUPWC.

RAY LIVES IN MINNESOTA NOW, BUT HE remembers when the bridge on the St. Croix River opened in 1930. His dad wanted to see Sheriff Saunders across the river, but the toll was fifty cents to cross the bridge. Ray remembers his dad wanting to back up and go another way so as not to pay that fifty cents.

*Ray cut 22,000 cakes of ice  
in one winter.*

Ray explained how the water table is very high around Crex Meadows. There were some good crops during the dry years. But the peat ground dried up and burned off, right down to the sand. West of town, the land never should have been drained. The same is true of Grantsburg’s bogs. Farmers drained the bogs so they could raise hay, only then they had to put in wells to irrigate.

Ray cut ice from Forest Lake and trucked the ice to deliver it to farmers. They stored it in sawdust. Later the iceman came around twice a week, with 24-inch squares of ice. Ray cut ’em 18 inches. He put up ice during Christmas vacation to make money. He used a big-toothed saw. You had to cut between your own legs and back up as you sawed. He packed those big ice cubes about six inches apart, with sawdust around the sides. He cut 22,000 cakes of ice in one winter, filling three big ice houses by the lake. It took about 100 cakes of ice per family to last the summer. You didn’t make ice cream too often in those days, but on the Fourth of July they made vanilla ice cream!



**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

DON WAS RAISED NEXT TO FISH LAKE, the westernmost natural lake in Wisconsin. When he was growing up, Don walked to the St. Croix River to go swimming, because it was too muddy at the lake. However, he skated on the lake in the winter.

*There was such a drought  
that the lake dried up.*

Don isn't sure how Fish Lake got its name. He didn't think it was from people named Fish. The homesteader he knew of there was named Ole Branstad, not Fish. Ole, who had been a prisoner of war during the Civil War, was automatically issued a homestead because he was a Civil War veteran. The first homestead didn't work out, so Ole let that one go and took another. A lot of farmers, like Ole, went to the sand country first, but it didn't always work out for them there. The lake had sunfish, panfish, and bullheads in it. The homesteaders fished northerns there for their winter fish supply too.

In the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, there was such a drought that the lake dried up, and Don's uncle and dad planted oats on the lake bottom. Oats were the only crop that would grow there. The crop had a lot of straw so it looked really good, but there wasn't much actual grain. The oats grew four to five feet high. They couldn't get the bundler in there.

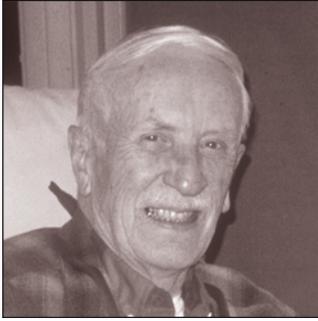
Don's dad fenced the west side of the lake because the cows would get in there to find better grass

and then get mired in the mud. When Don was in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), he pulled the wire and posts out of the ice and removed the fence.

Another thing Don did in the CCC was work on a survey crew, surveying Birch Island Lake. He followed the shoreline and cross-sectioned the lake. It was difficult work, using the surveying chains on snowshoes. It was hard to keep stooping over to pick up that chain. He had to shovel the snow away and cut a hole through the ice to get the depth of the lake. Eighteen feet down he could see the ripples in the sand on the bottom of the lake—that's how clear the water was. It was standard work for fish management to record the acreage, the weeds, and the water depth. Don took his own lunch. "There were about six of us." They'd build a fire in a brush pile and boil coffee in an open can and toast their sandwiches. If you burned pine, you might get sooty sandwiches. Apparently the old time DNR foresters did that too.

Fish Lake was the primary duck hunting lake in the area when Don was young. Thirty to forty people would camp there in his parents' pasture. The lake was higher then. There was more vegetation and you could have duck blinds (partial shelters duck hunters use to hide themselves).

There was rice on the north shore of the lake then. The southeast corner of the lake was all rice. One time Barney Devine, the game warden from Webster, told them they could pick rice. But when Don and his mother saw all the worms, they thought the rice was "wormy" and unusable, so they threw it all out.



**Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr.**

*Born: August 18, 1926*

BUD TOLD THE STORY OF THE CREATION of Phantom Lake. Norm Stone and the Wisconsin Conservation Department wanted to build a lake. Many people, even the engineers, were skeptical of the plan. But Joe Corbin, an engineer with the Conservation Department, must have believed that they could flood the area, because he worked on the dikes. In those days there were minimal hydrological studies or ground water research to find out about the water resources available to the project. The area had been drained for agriculture and ditched so the Crex Carpet Company could harvest grass for carpets. People thought there would never be enough water to fill a lake. They remembered the drought and fires of the 1930s. People were growing potatoes in the ground that had been the bottom of Fish Lake, just south of Grantsburg; that's how dry it was. So people thought the lake would never happen. To construct the dikes, dozers scraped off the layer of organic material in the marsh and built a pad. They dug a trench and used the material from the trench to build the dikes, with the official expectation that the area between the dikes would fill with water. It takes a lot of water to fill about 800 acres. But the water rose like a phantom, and a lake miraculously appeared where there had been none. Bud isn't sure who came up with the name Phantom Lake, but it might have been Norm Stone, since he liked to prove he was right.

The dikes are just "a stone's throw" from Grantsburg, after heavy rains. The DNR had to haul in fill and gravel to build up the dikes to prevent flooding in the village of Grantsburg, just ten or

twelve years ago. The dike at Fish Lake, south of Grantsburg, did break, and the flooding washed out roads and bridges, but no buildings. Fish Lake and Crex Meadows both drain to the St. Croix River.



*They dug a trench and used the material from the trench to build the dikes with the official expectation that the area between the dikes would fill with water.*



*The water rose like a phantom and a lake miraculously appeared where there had been none.*

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



**Albert Lorin Lord**

*Born: March 24, 1931*

**Gladys Lord Sampson**

*Born: August 23, 1911*

AL GREW UP LIVING IN A HOUSE THAT used to be a one-room schoolhouse. Now he lives in a bigger house next door. He said he had to pound a point twenty feet down to hit water, but he has a well. There's a little iron in it, but it's good, cold water. Solon Springs, where Al lives, used to be called White Birch. But fire wiped out the original village around the turn of the century. A man named Mr. Solon was bottling water there and shipping it out, so they started calling the place "Solon Springs".

When Al was a kid, he'd walk two or three miles to go swimming. He also liked to go fishing. Al's Aunt Gladys used to go fishing with Al's mother. Al said, "The fishing has changed since they put sewers in." You used to be able to catch a hundred bluegills, but now you couldn't catch that many in a whole week. The weeds died off. The few fish that live there live without the weeds. Now he wouldn't go swimming there either.

One kind of work Al did when he was younger was harvesting ice. He'd cut the ice out of the frozen lake. He'd have the horses pull it up the ramp to the wagon, then he took it to the icehouse. They layered the ice with sawdust to keep it cold as long as they could. The "cottage people" came all summer long to get a dime's worth of ice to put in their iceboxes. At age thirteen, Al would chop with an ice pick and break off a piece about 6 inches by 20 inches square. "Are you sure that's a dime's worth?" they'd say. They wanted the ice to last all weekend, but they didn't want to pay much for it. The "cottage people" came from Superior/Duluth, just for the summer.

Gladys' nephew, who lives in Seattle, used to come for the summers. Now he says it's "too commercialized." It's not the same. People don't walk up and down any more; they just get in a car and go. Al said the beach used to draw people there. There was a wooden water wheel, and the kids used to ride it into the water. And there were swings in the park. You could pump yourself up on a swing and then let go and fly into the lake. Or you could slide into the lake. Gladys remembered the toboggan slide in winter. You could go halfway across the lake when it was frozen. Al said the schoolteacher once took him across the lake when he was only four years old. It was like a teeter-totter with a pull lever: "Down she'd shoot!" Al loved it. But his mom got mad.

Al talked about wild ricing. He said he always put a canvas in the bottom of the canoe to catch the rice. One person bends the rice over the canoe and hits or taps it gently. All the bugs fall into the canoe as well as the ripe grains of rice. You end up swatting bugs. You have to be sure you have tight leggings on to keep the worms from crawling up your legs. Gladys said she never got to go ricing because two in a boat is all you can manage.

Al explained how Chippewa families used to tie the rice in bundles. Every family had their own colored ribbon. You didn't touch anybody else's ribbon. They tied the bundles in August. That helped keep the wind from whipping the grain out. The Chippewa used to reseed the rice beds too. They put some seeds in a ball of mud and threw it into the lake or river. Otherwise, without the mud, ducks would eat the seeds. "Now

*There used to be only Indians harvesting rice. Now there's a season for ricing.*

there's a season for ricing," Gladys pointed out. With the treaty rights, Al said, "We could go out before the White people. There used to be only Indians harvesting rice."

Al offered a recipe for a wild rice hot dish:

*Boil one cup of wild rice in two cups of water about an hour, until it pops open.*

*Fry a pound of pork sausage, a chopped onion, and a can of mushrooms.*

*Add salt and pepper to taste.*

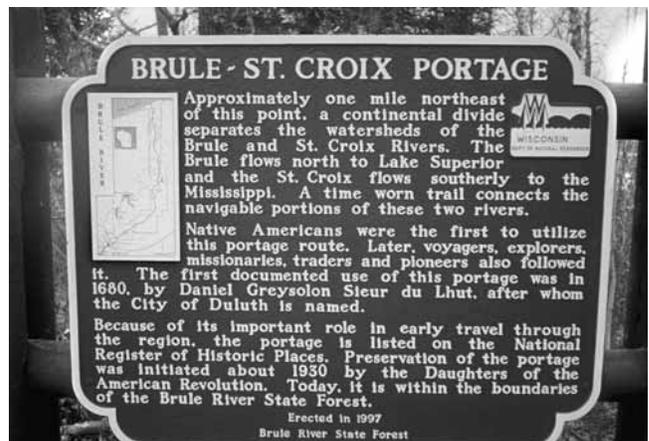
*Mix everything with a can of cream of chicken or mushroom soup, then cook it in the oven for a half hour, at 350° or so.*

The waterways were once an important network for transportation going in different directions. "There's a continental divide here," Al explained. The Brule River runs north and the St. Croix runs south. Al's grandfather carried mail from Superior to Milwaukee on the water trail, by canoe.

There was a "Witch's tree" on Lake Superior too. Al said that Indians would put "a gift of tobacco there," as they went past in their canoes. He also said, "Indians used to drink out of pitcher plants sometimes."

The winter before the 1998 interview, Al said there was low water level in the pond. Only one of the two beavers that were trying to live there survived the winter.

Al showed me a photo of the Ice Road. The main road to Solon Springs goes into the lake. You could drive over it in winter.



*At the Continental Divide, the Brule River runs north and the St. Croix runs south.*



**Robert John Becker**  
*Born: March 26, 1927*

AS A WRITER, BOB HAS NOTICED changes in the sand country. He said that the lakes are so developed that they are often overrun by boat traffic in the summer. It's no fun fishing with all the powerboats around; the pleasure is gone. So Bob does his fishing before school gets out for the summer and after Labor Day when school resumes. He's ice fished since he was ten years old. Bob considers ice fishing the greatest of all sports, the one true sport we have left. Though he does use a power auger to chop holes in the ice now, Bob finds the activity itself still meditative.



DNR ARCHIVE



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Top: Bob considers ice fishing the greatest of all sports.  
Bottom: The lakes are so developed that they are often overrun by boat traffic in the summer.*



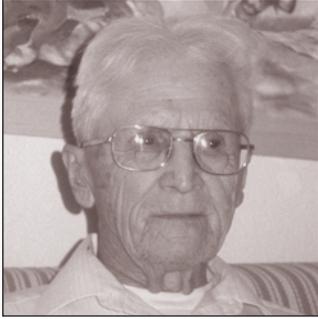
**Kay Ramel Karras**  
*Born: June 19, 1918*

**Helen Rein**  
*Born: October 9, 1918*

TWO FRIENDS WHO SHARED AN INTERVIEW, Helen and Kay, explained that the town of Solon Springs was once a village called White Birch. Kay believes it was founded by some voyageurs who carried their canoes along a portage trail, saw abundant white birches, and named the Chippewa village. Explorers and voyageurs didn't stay, but the first settlers of European descent were the Lucius, Batting, and Sauntry families. A man named Solon eventually bottled spring water from around the headwaters of the St. Croix River. That water went all over the world. The place became known as Solon Springs. Neither Helen nor Kay knew exactly why the water bottling business stopped, but Kay remembers where the springs were.

*You can stand on  
the bridge by  
the big spring and  
watch the water flow  
two directions at once.*

Helen says there are still springs at the head of the lake. You can stand on the bridge by the big spring and watch the water flow two directions at once. On one side of the road is Lake St. Croix, on the other, the Brule River. A blacktop road separates the two waterways and you can see the water flowing in two different directions.



**Lafayette Connor**

*Born: March 29, 1900*

FAYE GREW UP PLAYING IN THE YELLOW River, chasing suckers. He looked forward to spring every year, for pike, and sturgeon, as well as suckers. There was one eight-foot long sturgeon that spawned there. She was always followed by males. Faye said he still liked to go there and fish alone. He explained that the sunfish became elongated because of the pressure of running water. It was that way in the Clam River too.

Faye said he remembered Devils Lake when there wasn't a house there. Now you can't even buy a lot on it. Yellow Lake is the same way. People are even buying up the little potholes to raise trout. He doesn't like the way we are poisoning our environment with insecticides, fertilizers, and things like that. In recent years, he said, a plant that made telephone products was closed because it was poisoning a trout stream. One of the key messages Faye wanted to convey was to eliminate the poisons and keep the water clean.

Faye said his dad sold wild rice to a company in St. Paul. He bought it for fifteen cents a pound and sold it for twenty cents. Once he was asked to get a ton of wild rice. He bought it all from his friends. Wild rice is the only grain originating in North America, Faye said; corn came from South America.

Faye said Norm Stone was a pretty nice fellow who worked hard for the Conservation Department, building the dikes and making Crex Meadows what it is today. He said his brother went trout fishing with Norm one time,

up in Douglas County. Faye understood that Norm's work had something to do with bringing geese to Mystic Lake there in Grantsburg. There never used to be wild rice there, he added, but now there is. Somebody planted it.



DNR ARCHIVE



JOHN LYONS



JOHN LYONS

*Faye grew up playing in the Yellow River, chasing suckers. He looked forward to spring every year, for pike (top), and sturgeon (middle), as well as suckers (bottom).*



**Lolita Spooner Taylor**

*Born: July 19, 1908*

LOLITA HAS PUBLISHED SEVERAL BOOKS based on Ojibwa heritage, including *Old Meshikee and the Little Crabs: An Ojibwe Story*.

There are no little crabs here, she explained, but the Ojibwa came from the East Coast, where there are little crabs. The story traveled from one body of water to another, in the voices of the people.

*In the legend, a family of little crabs plays their little drums. But when Old Meshikee, the great big turtle, played his big drums, the crabs couldn't hear their own drums. The crabs had a meeting and came out laughing and clapping. They made a long rope from the inside of elm bark, and they tied up that big old turtle. They left him sitting in the sand while they had another meeting. Again they came out laughing. They made a fire. Old Meshikee got worried. "Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do?" "We're gonna throw you into the fire!" Old Meshikee threatened to scatter hot coals all over their children. The crabs had another meeting. They brought up water in birch bark baskets. "Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do?" "We're gonna throw you in boiling water!" Old Meshikee threatened to splash boiling water all over their children. The crabs had another meeting. They came out laughing and singing. They pushed and pulled Old Meshikee. "Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do?" "We're gonna push you off the cliff into the water below!" The old turtle tried to get away, but they pushed and pulled until he fell down into the water below. The crabs went back to play their drums and have a good time. By and by they heard loud drumming again.*

The story works when you understand that the turtle is at home in the water. An experienced teacher, Lolita explained that this story could be used both for amusement and to test whether the children were understanding everything.

Lolita's grandfather, William B. Connor, operated the Orange post office. She said he went fishing every year with a man from Illinois. There was no limit on fishing in those days. Lolita said she still loves the taste of bass.

One time Lolita got involved in a legal dispute. The DNR was saying a piece of land had always been an island. If this was the case, apparently the state could claim the island. But Lolita remembers when it was not an island. The cattle went there and she went after them. She found blue clay there, and she made some little dishes with the clay. She didn't save the dishes, but she did testify that that piece of land was not always an island.

*There isn't the wild rice there used to be. Maybe motor boats and herbicides have spoiled it.*

Lolita wrote a book called *Ojibwa: The Wild Rice People*. She explained that the wild rice is nothing now, compared to what it used to be. The Ojibwa took care of his own rice. In the fall, someone went to the lake to see when it was

*In the Ojibwa story of creation, water was given the power of purity and renewal.*

ready. They went through the rice one day, then let it rest. Rice ripens from the bottom up, so two or three days later they could go pick some more. When gathering rice, one person poles the boat, and the other gathers the rice with slender, tapered cedar sticks. The sticks are lightweight. The ricker holds one stick in each hand. With one he brushes the rice into the canoe. He doesn't hit the rice. The ripe seeds will brush right off. The other seeds will stay to ripen. Now people hit the rice so hard that they break the stalks. Or motor boats go through and destroy the rice. There isn't the rice there used to be. Maybe herbicides have spoiled it too. She used to gather it, but now she buys it.

The Ojibwa traditionally used a winnowing basket made of birch bark. The rice has "beards" on it. The people would knead it with their hands in the boat, then put it in the basket and toss it up and down. The lighter parts of the rice would fall out of the basket, leaving the desirable grain. They dried the rice on birch bark or reed rugs then put it in the kettle to scorch it. They would pick rice in the morning, dry it a little, and parch it in a big dry kettle the same day. It smelled wonderful. The rice crackled so they knew when to take it out. Then they'd winnow it again so the light stuff would fly out. Then they'd sink a tub in a hole in the ground and line it with deerskin. A man would put on new moccasins and, holding onto a pole, twist his feet on the rice in the tub just right to get the husks off the grain. They'd winnow it again, thrash it more, and winnow it again until it was perfect. It was fun to do and it was a pleasure



GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Lolita wrote a book called "Ojibwa: The Wild Rice People". The Ojibwa harvested the grains when they were ripe and brushed right off the stalks. The wild rice is nothing now, compared to what it used to be.*

being outside. Now machines do the work. Wild rice was the main food of the Ojibwa people. Her personal favorite was wild rice mixed with mud-hens and onions.

Lolita explained that in the Ojibwa story of creation, water was given the power of purity and renewal. Clean water is important in Ojibwa culture. Also, in Ojibwa tradition, it is customary to put an offering of tobacco under a big tree when there is a big storm or when you are crossing water that is rough.

For the future, Lolita wants the streams cleaned up. She said she and her husband, Ollie, went fishing one day towards Indian Creek. But the places they liked to fish had cows standing in them. The fishing was ruined in those places.



**William Soderbeck**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Alice Johnson Soderbeck**

*Born: October 6, 1914*

BECAUSE BILL AND ALICE LIVE NEAR THE river, and Bill's family ran a ferry for years, they had a lot to say related to water.

The Soderbecks pointed out that this Northwest Sands Area was a lake at one time. Now the former lake is underground, with much of the lake bed filled with sand. Only rain draining through the sand replenishes the water in that lake now, and the water level has been lowered because of the many homes with wells in the area. To reach water now, it has become necessary to dig deeper and deeper wells.

They remembered John Norton and his family of six kids. The family had cattle and corn, but no fertilizers. They had to cut wild hay. They put bog shoes on the horses when it was wet. They couldn't pay the taxes and lost the land because they couldn't sell it either. They

probably moved across the river in winter, when they could cross on the ice, before there was a ferry.

In 1922, Bill's dad built the Riverdale Ferry. Grantsburg, in Wisconsin, and Pine City, in Minnesota, were both county seats so they needed the ferry to get from one to the other. Four cars at a time or two teams could fit on it at once, but it mostly hauled single vehicles. It cost fifty cents per trip.

Minnesota people used the ferry to haul grain to the feed mill. There were fourteen teams going by the house some days. The feed mill was run by water power in Grantsburg. There was a sawmill by the ferry too, so they could keep pretty busy. They hauled nice square-sawed lumber to Forest Lake. Cars would honk their horns, and the ferry would come across to get them.



*They put bog shoes on the horses when it was wet. A bog shoe is a flat piece of wood that straps onto the horse's foot and disperses the weight over a broader area to help prevent sinking deeply into the bog.*



*The ferry hauled grain to the feed mill and square cut lumber from the sawmill. It could haul four cars at a time or two teams of horses.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

*The river is not the same for fish as it used to be either. When Bill was a kid, the river was full of sunken logs that made good spawning sites for fish. Those logs are gone now and there are fewer fish.*

When they put horses on the ferry, they were fine at first. But as the ferry came towards shore, the horses would start to back up. If you put a sack over the horses' heads, then it was okay.

Alice talked about the time Roy, Bill's brother, went through the ice in a car. The edges of the river were frozen solid so it looked safe, but there were air bubbles over running water in the middle of the river, so Roy and the car fell through. Roy was really lucky to get out. They had to saw a channel of ice to pull the car out. They dropped a hook with a chain to snag the bumper and used a horse to pull the car out.

Snow that falls on top of ice on the river can push the ice down so that water flows over it. Later, as the water flows off the ice, the ice rises again. In the shallow rapids, the water may be colder than freezing temperature, but it can't freeze because it's moving. Because it's so cold, however, ice forms on the rocks under the water. They call this "anchor ice," and it sticks to everything.

Near his house, Bill said the lake "leaked and ran into the St. Croix River" so there are many springs washing sand into the St. Croix now. A sand bar has accumulated by each spring. The once-nice fishing holes are filling up with sand now. When he was a kid, there were eight to ten feet of water below the big rapids. There were three sand drifts in a drop off within a mile or so. Today it's leveled off, smooth. It's hard to get through in a boat now though, as the river is getting wider and shallower as trees fall in and more and more dirt fills in the



DNR ARCHIVE

riverbed. Several rivers come together near there, so the river fluctuates a lot.

The river is not the same for fish as it used to be either. When Bill was a kid, the river was full of sunken logs that made good spawning sites for fish. Those logs are gone now and there are fewer fish. Promoting the area for recreation has brought hundreds of canoes here, and it doesn't take many fish caught per person to reduce fish populations.

Alice remembered only one time the river was coming up to their door. A dam on the Namekagon River broke. There was a lot of rain too. The water level was much higher than usual; it came right up to the road. That was in the 1940s. Bill said logs drifted right into the driveway on the river. Alice remembered their boys going up and down the road in a rowboat. Bill explained that their home is on a gravel bar, where the river used to be but isn't now. That time the water came up gradually. Alice said there were 29 inches of water in the basement because the sump pump quit. If a dam broke now, Bill said, it wouldn't wash Grantsburg away, though a dam did break, and the water took out all the bridges in the early 1950s. There had been some terrible flooding in the area in 1998, the year of the interview.



**Dorothy Frosch**  
*Born: March 1, 1916*

ONE OF THE THINGS DOROTHY LOVED about the sand country when she moved here in 1963 was that she'd come home from work tired and sweaty and go for a swim before supper. That made her feel like a new person. Although she didn't have much time for fishing, she said she enjoyed it sometimes in the evenings.

Fishing's not as good now, she said. You have to work to catch the fish, and they're not as big or as many as the fish used to be. There are just too many people. There are campgrounds all around the lake now. Dorothy signed a petition against the campground, but it was put in anyway. There are trailers there. There are too many campgrounds. She says she doesn't see as many water birds as she used to either.



*Dorothy says there are campgrounds all around the lake now. Many people are coming to the area.*



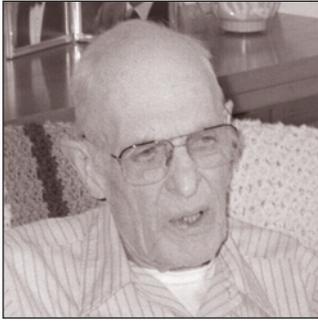
**Betty Donis  
Lockert Hanson**  
*Born: January 18, 1934*

BETTY OWNS LAND AND A CABIN IN THE Fish Lake area. She says there are no fish in Fish Lake to speak of. Although she grew up on a farm in the country, she didn't go fishing much. It was an effort to go to the lake, and her dad didn't have time for fishing until she was older.

*Betty thinks it's great that the St. Croix is considered a "Wild River" and is protected.*

It may have been an effort to go to the lake to go fishing in the warm weather, but in the winter, they went tobogganing and ice-skating, in spite of hand-me-down skates that never fit exactly right. Her mom used a shovel to make a level spot on the ice on a spill-off from Fish Lake, and they would build a bonfire. Once they got there and did all the work of clearing snow off the ice, they'd stay a long time. Betty's brother always built a jump on the hill, which they called "Blueberry Hill." Betty would sit on the back end of the toboggan so she could get off before they reached the jump.

Betty thinks it's great that the St. Croix is considered a "Wild River" and is protected. She would like it if the DNR had more authority to tell people to clean it up.



**William R. Mason**

*Born: September 8, 1923*

BILL RECALLED THAT IN THE WINTER you could drive across the St. Croix River on the ice, but in the summer you had to use a ferry. For the people who ran the Rush City Ferry, it was a 24-hour a day job. Bill's dad relieved them. Bill worked on the ferry for a while too. Eventually he bought the ferry and ran it, but only during the summer months. In the 1940s, they charged fifty cents. Farmers and people from both Grantsburg and Rush City used the ferry. Even after the bridge was first built, people continued to use the ferry for several years. It was cheaper than the toll on the bridge, though it took people out of their way to use the ferry. Bill said he fished in the river too. There was a big sawmill on the other side of the river, right by the ferry. He'd get out on the pier and fish for smallmouth bass. He'd just use a line with a hook and some worms. He didn't need a pole. Otherwise, the river was a good place to lose your spoons, etc. in the deadheads. Once he and his dad went upstream to Soderbeck's ferry and camped near there. They saw fish in the shallow

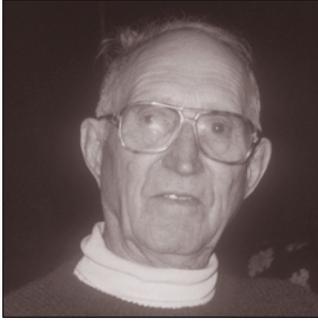


*Bill said he fished in the river. He'd get out on the pier and fish for smallmouth bass. He'd just use a line with a hook and some worms. He didn't need a pole.*

water. They kept casting and casting, but the fish were "shovelnose trout" that feed off the bottom. They can't take a plug. They were really big fish, but he didn't catch any of them. He didn't know if they were good eating anyway.

Not all of Bill's connection to the river was related to occupation or recreation. The very day he moved out of the family homestead on the river, by the old ferry, in May 1949, one of his sons drowned in the river. The boy was just twenty-one months old. Bill and his wife, Eleanor, had the last load of stuff packed up to go. When they called the little boy, he didn't answer. The child had been playing by the ferry. He'd been playing unnoticed for about fifteen minutes. When the boy didn't respond to their calls, Bill and two others went down the river in a boat. About 500 feet from the dock, they found the boy's body. It was floating on top of the water. Though Bill spoke no more about this occurrence during the interview, this was an unwanted tie between him and the river that must have influenced his connection to that body of water in some profound way thereafter.

Bill said the cities should expand into the sand land. He considered the sand country good to build on and "there's good water there too." He said there's no problem with sewage or with the ground heaving. It was rare that the St. Croix River flooded up into the cabins too, maybe once in ten years. Of course he was a child in the drought years, when the absence of water was the definitive factor. In those days, he didn't think "too greatly about the land."



**Lowell Donald Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*

ONE MESSAGE LOWELL WANTED TO convey to the land management planners is that the river corridor should be maintained. He doesn't think people should be allowed to build along it.

When asked about people who had a significant impact on the land, he said he considered the William Soderbeck family heroes in this capacity. "They know the St. Croix River like the back of their hand," he said. They used to have a ferry there.

Lowell talked about the paint mine that was once run by a waterwheel. Around 1890, about 12 miles northwest of Grantsburg along the St. Croix River, a prospector named David Canedy was driving a shaft in the ground looking for copper, when he found a substance that was good for making paint. Eventually someone built a big facility that was run by a waterwheel to process the "paste." They shipped out paste that was very good quality, but the buyer had to mix his own paint from the paste. There were two colors, one tan and the other reddish. The paint lasted a long time, and people rarely had to buy more. The factory was abandoned around 1912; Lowell didn't know why. Maybe they ran out of paste, or maybe the paint lasted such a long time that people didn't have to buy more. Hauling in a steam engine to the kiln, they made bricks of superior quality there for a while too. Lowell went there in 1940. The factory was a beautiful building, and he wanted to start a dance hall there. The waterwheel was sold for scrap iron in World War II. Now just the foundation of the building remains.

*Lowell thinks the river corridor should be maintained.*



**Marjorie Martell Tutor**

*Born: January 15, 1912*

THOUGH SHE'S LIVED OTHER PLACES, Marjorie still considers the barrens home. She visited the sand country many times to go fishing. She'd take a blanket to roll up in and take a snooze, then wake up when a fish pulled the line. Her uncle and aunt went with her and her husband. They caught bass, bluegills, and pumpkinseeds. They went bullheading too. To catch bullheads, they took a boat out and fished at night. It was easy to get a ten-gallon can full in no time. You weren't limited the way you are today.

She remembered that when she was a girl, her family had a big boxed-in well. They would dip water out of it. They also hung gallons of milk down in the well to cool them.

Margie said the sand country has changed some. There are better roads, and people can see things. You can get to the lakes more easily than you used to be able to, but you can't just camp out at the lakes now, the way people used to do.



EUNICE PADLEY

*He used the image of a pebble tossed into a pool, sending out ripples: the way a piece of land is managed affects the land around it.*

## Eugene Connor

*Born: July 25, 1928*

GENE WAS WORKING AT THE TRIBAL Center for the St. Croix Band of Chippewa in Hertel at the time of the interview. He had strong opinions about what the DNR should be doing. He used the image of a pebble tossed into a pool, sending out ripples: the way a piece of land is managed affects the land around it. He said the DNR should enforce the laws that exist, respect treaty rights, and go out for clean air and water. We should insist on the big things like clean air and water. That's what needs to be changed back to the way it used to be. He said the idea of giving a fish a pill to make it immune to mercury poisoning so people could eat them would be the kind of thing he'd expect the DNR to think of. Gene thought government should be trying to help people. He said the Chippewa people wanted to start a fish hatchery, but the DNR was "dragging its feet." "Business has always driven government," he said. "What kind of public relations is it not to tell tourists they can't eat more than three fish out of that lake because of mercury poisoning?" Gene also expressed frustration over when the DNR wanted to put public access on a lake and did a survey of resorts and bass fishermen in Siren. But nobody contacted the Tribes to see how they'd feel about public access on their lake. "We didn't want the public to enter the lake unless they knew somebody there. Not the tourists."

Gene said there's no rice in Rice Lake now and hasn't been for years. The water quality has been too bad. Wisconsin only produces five or six percent of the wild rice now; Minnesota produces most of it. It used to be that each family had their

own wild rice plot. They would sometimes stand on shore and say "No rice today" to give the rice a rest. Now there's not much wild rice, yet everyone wants to pick it. "Would you want to conserve the wild rice for the consumer?" If you enlarge the paddy, it becomes paddy rice, not wild rice any more. If you don't have the water quality to begin with, and you can't regulate weather conditions like El Niño, you can't solve the problems of the world by putting ink on paper.

To give an example of how concerned about clean water he is, Gene said he drank bottled water all the time on a recent trip to Washington, DC. He didn't trust the water to be safe to drink otherwise. We have reached a sad state of affairs when we can't safely drink the water wherever we are. Gene values water resources in the sand country and would like to see water quality improved and maintained.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Wisconsin only produces a small amount of the wild rice now; Minnesota produces most of it. Now everyone wants to pick it. If you enlarge the paddy, it becomes paddy rice, not true wild rice.*



**Catherine Jones Strharsky**

*Born: October 6, 1922*

**Joseph Strharsky**

*Born: August 14, 1923*

KATIE GREW UP IN CLAY COUNTRY, BUT she likes the drainage of the sand country. She remembered her driveway back home—it was muddy, and you could get stuck easily. In the sand country, you don't get mud on your shoes. Also, the drainage is efficient. The water is gone a half hour after a heavy rain.

Joe particularly likes the lakes and the fishing. There were no lakes in Ino, where he grew up. He came to the Iron River area to go fishing and hunting.



**Nina May Coos Wicklund**

*Born: March 3, 1919*

**Betty Irene Coos Magnuson**

*Born: October 6, 1920*

DURING THE 1930s, THE LAKES DREW vacationers, and Nina and Betty's dad, Alver D. Coos, recognized a potential income source. He started a broiler business. He killed and dressed chickens and sold them to the tourists around the lakes. They took cream to the creamery and got buttermilk back. They mixed the buttermilk with mash for the chickens. With these kinds of activities, keeping things cool in summer was pretty important. They had no electricity, no freezer. They hauled ice for themselves in the winter and stored it in the icehouse, in sawdust.

When she thought about how things have changed since she was a girl, Nina exclaimed that she would've given anything to have the land this way then, with the dikes, the geese, and the ducks. When she thought about how she'd like the sand country to be twenty years from now, she said she likes it the way Crex Meadows is, except for the water level. She thinks the water quality went down after they built the dikes.

*Nina would have given anything to have had the land this way when she was a girl, with the dikes, the geese, and the ducks, but she is concerned about the water quality.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Michael Newago**

*Born: November 2, 1918*

**Kathryn Munson**

*Born: May 29, 1919*

WHEN MIKE WAS NINE YEARS OLD HE began his fishing work on Lake Superior. He used pond nets. He put stakes in the water first. Now, he said, they use buoys. Then he put in the nets of twine. He could do it alone; others seemed to need four or five people to put their nets in. He caught all kinds of fish, trout and whitefish especially. He'd pull the ropes and lift the nets by hand, and scoop the fish out. He dressed the fish and took them to market in Bayfield, where they were loaded on a train and shipped to Chicago. He said he could still get some kinds of fish, but not as many as when he started. "Indians plant fish out in the lake again," he said, from fingerling ponds. "They're not just catching all the fish."

Mike said he used to get a lot of smelt until people from the cities came with nets and seines and took the fish back to Minneapolis or Chicago. Seining rather than just catching fish with a hook and line leads to an absence of smelt for a few years. Mike said he'd make beach fires; fires would draw the

smelt in towards the light. Some people say that trout ate all the smelt, but Mike said smelt came to spawn later than brown trout. His dad used to look at popple trees. When the new, spring leaves on the popples were the size of a dime, that's when the smelt and suckers would come. "We were all smoking and eating suckers." His mom would put a bunch of suckers in a gunny sac, take them home, skin, and pickle them.

With Kathryn Munson, Mike reminisced about herring season. You'd have to get a ride to your fishing spot, then walk home because you smelled so fishy. You'd bring home under-sized trout for supper because you couldn't sell them. Mike said he'd be out there catching herring from 4:00 a.m. to midnight, and never get tired. But Kathryn said she'd get "cold between the shoulders" just standing there picking fish out of the nets. They'd have a fish boil Swedish style, with lots of onions and salt in a big pot on a wood stove.

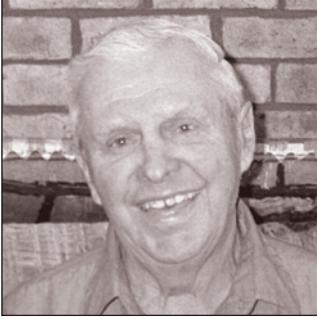


*When the new, spring leaves on the popples were the size of a dime, that's when the smelt (above) and suckers would come. "We were all smoking and eating suckers."*



*With Kathryn Munson, Mike reminisced about herring season. You'd have to get a ride to your fishing spot, then walk home because you smelled so fishy.*

PHOTOS: JOHN LYONS



**Russell Lester Connor**

*Born: March 1, 1923*

AROUND 1875, RUSS' GRANDFATHER homesteaded on Connor Lake. He came there because he'd walked through the area in 1863. He'd seen the rivers and beautiful lakes. There are five major scenic rivers in the area: the Clam, Yellow, St Croix, Namekagon, and Totagatic. Russ hasn't always been in the barrens. He could've stayed in Hawaii, where the army took him. But he chose to return to the sand country. He said he "wanted to get back to the rivers and lakes and do hunting and fishing and be able to come and go as he wanted." The rivers and lakes of the area are important to him.

Russ told about the Empire Railroad and Copper Mine Dam, north of County Highway T. The St. Croix River was dammed to create a lake. The narrow gauge railroad dumped logs on the ice in winter. When it was spring, they opened the dam and sleuced the logs through to Stillwater, Minnesota, where the logs were processed. The dam is still there in Douglas County. Quite a structure, it's referred to as the Copper Mine Dam. The old logging pins and spikes are still there too.

Lafayette Connor taught Russ the Indian method for processing wild rice. Most wild rice is processed in equipment intended for white rice. Together Faye and Russ designed a thrashing machine that was gentle on the rice. They developed a parcher to toast and dehydrate the rice. They used oakwood fire, not other fuels. They knew how to parch rice by hand, but they had to figure out how to do it by machine. If you don't stir the rice in the kettle, it will burn.

Faye stirred the rice, and Russ timed him. They determined that Faye stirred the rice about 16 times per minute. They built the parcher out of a barrel with a paddle that turned the rice sixteen times per minute. When you do this by hand, there's no uniformity. They put 60 pounds of rice in the barrel at once and let the machine do the work. When they tipped the rice out of the parcher, they were overjoyed because it was perfect! They also used an old fashioned fanning mill to separate the grain from the chaff. Russ doesn't process a lot of wild rice, but he says he makes the best. He sells it all over through a mailing list. He said it's important to process the rice quickly after you get it from the lake. It shouldn't lie there more than over night.

Russ said his grandfather told him about being a boy in Duluth. The adults would tell him not to play by the water or "Egogseagog" would get him. Egogseagog was a three-legged turtle with a big stone axe on the fourth leg. The stone ax could cut right through a teepee. Russ said this myth was generated and reiterated to keep the kids away from the water so they wouldn't drown. That giant devil turtle kept the kids in line.

Russ raised concerns about the fish-rearing factory in the Danbury area, with the effluent and debris from the processed fish to be dumped into the St. Croix River. This would warm the water. It would take five pulp trucks of oakwood a day to heat all the water. Russ really did not want to see all that dumped in the river. "I have no knowledge of how the plant works," Russ said. "I can only hope that all the safeguards are in place."

*Faye and Russ designed a thrashing machine that was gentle on the rice.*

Russ used to guide a fellow named Dan Faith, an Italian immigrant from Chicago, who spent years fishing in the sand country. They must have fished the St. Croix fifty or sixty times. Up and down the river, Dan would chastise Russ: “Why didn’t you buy land in Hawaii?” Dan married Lilian, who cleaned all his fish, from the Gulf of Mexico to Alaska. Dan got out the old recipes from Italy and asked his wife if she would use them. Otherwise, he said he wouldn’t marry her. She gave her solemn word to prepare his mother’s recipes.

Asked about changes in the area, Russ pointed out the influx of humanity and the correlating lakeshore development. Lakeshores are cluttered; lots should have been laid out larger. Russ specifically objects to the disfigurement of lakeshores by pontoons, docks, and such “eyesores”.



*Asked about changes in the area, Russ pointed out, lakeshores are cluttered; lots should have been laid out larger. Russ specifically objects to the disfigurement of lakeshores by pontoons, docks, and such “eyesores”.*



**Franklin Basna**

*Born: June 25, 1914*

FRANK SAID HE’D FISHED FOR FORTY years on the lake. He started when he was fourteen years old. A fellow named Carl and his son Oscar had a fishing boat. Frank tried it and found fishing came naturally to him. He’d be picking three or four fish out of the net while everybody else was only getting one at a time. Frank remembered going fishing with Elvis Moe and Joe Baker, fishing for reef herring along Bear Island Reef. They started in early November. They could pick up one and a half tons of fish a day. The herring were big. They loaded up the boat with eight boxes of dry nets. Five minutes offshore, they’d drop the nets in and pick a ton of fish out of them. One time Elvis was putting the line down to see if there were herring there, when he started jumping up and down. They couldn’t pull the net back. They got seven tons of fish in one day. They put in twenty-three days of steady fishing. They didn’t pull out until December 23. They got a nice bonus of \$250 each because they caught 128 tons of fish in one boat.

Frank said his grandpa, Bill Baker, used to sell suckers around the village from a wheelbarrow. He’d sell ’em for twenty-five cents a piece. Frank used to make corn meal soup, a chowder. He used to eat whitefish pipes, a part from inside, and caviar. To get the caviar, he’d squeeze the eggs out of the fish, any fish. With a shovel, he filled a box up with fish eggs. He also mentioned eating lawyer fish. “It’s one of the best eating fish,” he said. You pull the skin off. It makes a poor man’s shrimp. If you slice and cook it in hot fat, it curls like a shrimp.



**Nora Searles**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Harold Searles**

*Born: September 13, 1911*

HAROLD AND NORA SEARLES LIVE BY Lake Pokegama and the Clam River. Harold's dad and grandfather started Searles Cranberry Marsh there. They put in the dikes about 1910. Both sand and water are required for a cranberry marsh. You need flowing water and good drainage. To protect the cranberries from frost, you flood them. There's a system of dams, dikes, ditches, and small wooden bulkheads. They get water from Lake Pokegama. Harold's father and grandfather bought the land, including most of the land around the lake, so there are no cottages on it. They have the right to take water from it. It's a spring-fed lake, so the water level comes back up. But Harold knows that more people on the lake would probably mean more problems.

The lake is dammed so you can hold the water or let it go. Every five years or so it used to rain a lot, and the Clam River would flood. They'd lose almost all their crop. It took them hauling dirt night and day to hold back the flood then. Now you can hold the water up so you won't lose the crop. But the dam has not been without problems either. Once somebody who didn't like the dam dug a hole through it and drained the lake.

But today it looks easy. They use a sprinkler system to protect the cranberries from frost, powered by diesel pumps because electric power can go out too readily. In winter they put sand on the ice to eventually melt and go down onto the vines under the ice. The sand covers up the old vines, shortening them, so the cranberries grow on from the remainder.

At the end of September or early October, they harvest the berries. In the east, they dry raked

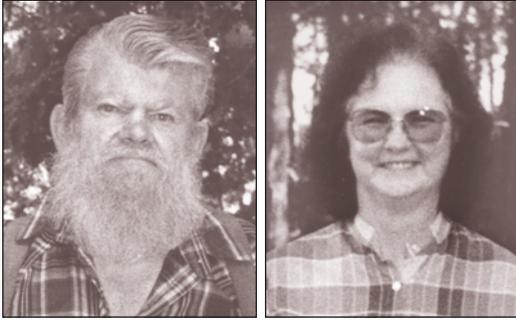
the berries when they harvested them, but here in Wisconsin, Harold's grandfather started using water for the harvest. The berries float up and you scoop them right up out of the water. This is called "water raking." You still have to keep the ditches clear so the water can go through. Weeds growing in the ditches become obstacles. Though muskrats eat some of the weeds, they also dig into the beds and fill the ditches or dig into the dikes and put holes in them. Beaver sometimes chew holes in the wooden splashboards or gates.

Harold and Nora told about the kinds of fish they've caught in the lake: sunfish, northerns, black bass, bullheads, and crappies. They didn't catch walleyes because those fish need a gravel bottom. Nora commented that there are more small northerns than there used to be. They used to catch larger northerns than they do today.



*To protect the cranberries from frost, you flood them. There's a system of dams, dikes, ditches, and small wooden bulkheads. They get water from Lake Pokegama.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Milton Herman Aronson**

*Born: December 29, 1939*

**Eleanor Bistram Aronson**

*Born: November 10, 1942*

GROWING UP, ELEANOR HAD NO electricity, but she enjoyed playing ball, making “grass spears” by pulling the ends of the barbs out of the grass and throwing them at her brothers or cousins. “They still have that kind of grass here,” she commented. She also liked to swim in the murky pond behind her grandparents’ place, and she swam in Buggert’s Lake. Now she likes having the St. Croix River so close. Her grandchildren ride their bikes there and go fishing. She likes canoeing on the river in the evenings when the beaver come out to swim. She used to be the only one there canoeing; now there are lots of canoes.

Milt is interested in water quality in the area because he used to trap leeches for income, and leeches are “one of the cleanest things there is;” they require really good water. He trapped them in coffee cans and sold them for bait.

One of the things Milt likes about living in the sand country is that the water drainage is good. You can drive a sand point in any place and in about 15 feet you can have good drinking water. Milt said that even though water quality in general is “pooping out,” and water is being used up, you can still get good water in the sand country. Milt has a hand pump outside.

Eleanor said her grandpa helped build the dikes around Crex Meadows. He worked for the Wisconsin Conservation Department. He’d come across the sugar sand and drive across the dikes on his way home after a few beers. His wife was scared because there was loose sand and water on either side of the road. At the time of the interview, Eleanor said, there was so much grass

growing on the dikes that the water was disappearing. One year everybody flooded out, and everybody blamed the DNR for that too. But mostly, Eleanor considered the dikes a good thing. She said Norm Stone was a hero to the land because he started the dikes. Now you can go and see birds and other wildlife there at Crex Meadows.

Eleanor and Milt like living close to the river. Eleanor says the day they started calling it “the wild river” was the day it became unwild. People came in when they put up signs. Then it was the people who were wild, not the river. You used to be able to leave your boat and gear out all summer, and nobody would touch it. Now they wouldn’t even leave their car parked out by the river for a day for fear someone would siphon the gas out or break into the car. Milt said that he used to be able to dig clams out for fishing, but now it’s illegal to even take a dead shell out of the water. He guessed the clam population must have gone down.



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*Mostly Eleanor considered the dikes a good thing. Now you can go and see birds and other wildlife at Crex Meadows.*



**Alexander (Ike)  
Louis Gokee**

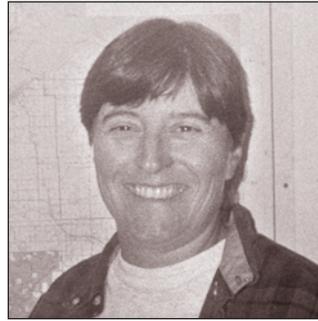
*Born: December 29, 1918*

IKE WORKED AT THE DUPONT PLANT for five years from 1965 to 1970. He cooked up chemicals and made TNT. He thought he would be able to retire there, but they closed the plant. Some Northland College students discovered a creek going into the lake was flowing red with chemicals. They put pressure on the plant and stopped the plant. Now that little creek is hardly running; it's barely a trickle.

Ike's daughter, Liz Montano, shared another water-related anecdote. One winter day when Lake Superior was frozen, Ike went out on the ice and opened up his jacket like a sail. The wind took him all the way across Lake Superior, approximately two miles, over to Bass. He walked back, against the wind. He did it just for fun.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Joyce Zifco**

*Born: October 27, 1953*

DURING THE INTERVIEW, JOYCE TALKED a lot about controlling and fighting fires, which certainly entailed the use of water. But she also mentioned that there are few waterholes in the northern part of the Northwest Sands Area. If you see one, you are lucky. She's dug some waterholes for the use of wildlife or to aid in the fight against fires. A soil expert has to test the soil, because you need clay soil to hold the water. Most ponds are shallow. Waterholes can be used to control fires, but it is more difficult to access the water when the water table is low. Increased urbanization and lakeshore development can increase the risk of fire while increased water usage resulting from the development can lower the water level.

Joyce is also concerned about erosion of the sandy soil. Heavy rains wash soil and vegetation away, causing erosion where ATVs have already torn the ground.

Joyce appreciates the diversity of nature, and she wants to see the natural resources of the area protected. It's Lake Superior that keeps bringing her back.

*Joyce appreciates the diversity of nature and wants to see the natural resources of the area protected. It's Lake Superior that keeps bringing her back.*



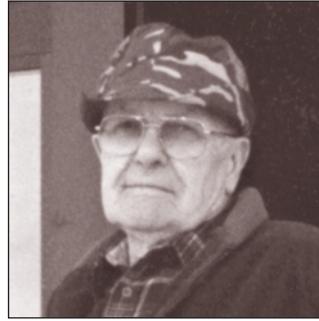
**Judith Pratt-Shelley**  
Born: January 24, 1959

JUDY WAS WORKING AT THE TRIBAL Center in Red Cliff when I asked her what she values about the barrens. She said “groundwater gets recharged there.” We rely on groundwater for drinking. People may not realize how rare good water is in other places. Precipitation goes into the ground and into the groundwater, and that’s what we will drink in the future. Therefore, Judy would like to advise people not to use herbicides or pesticides, because they can pollute the groundwater.

*Judy says groundwater gets recharged in the barrens.*



*With many small lakes infertile because of the jack pine and the soil, fish managers at the Spooner Fish Hatchery (top) worked to transfer panfish to more fertile waters where they would grow.*



**Clarence Arthur Wistrom**  
Born: January 18, 1909

THE INTERVIEW WITH CLARENCE WAS conducted after hours at the Spooner Fish Hatchery, where Clarence used to work. He said he’d lived next door to the fish hatchery for twenty-six years.

Clarence explained that many of the small lakes in the area are quite infertile, largely because of the jack pine forest and the soil. There’s not the same quality of decay with jack pine needles. Also, there’s a problem of slow-growing fish.

Maintaining good fish populations for public consumption is hard. Fish managers worked to transfer panfish to more fertile waters where they would grow. Lakeshore property was in high demand, and anyone purchasing that land expected a quality of fishing that just wasn’t there. In the 1940s and ’50s, they stocked predator fish to feed on the small ones, and fishing improved. They stocked muskies in some larger lakes, bass in smaller ones.

Today the main use of the area is as a vacation land, because it’s close to the Twin Cities. The sand country has been practically taken over by cottage owners on almost every lake. Most of the people with summer cottages on lakes are from St. Paul and Minneapolis. The transition from farming the land to recreational use of the lakes has been good for the area. It has meant employment for people in small communities and tax dollars that could be spent on improving the roads. Most of the roads in the sand country have been paved in the last 30 years, which makes the area more accessible to more people.

Clarence liked to go fishing with Bill Wagner. Bill was supervisor of law enforcement in the

## Clarence Arthur Wistrom *(continued)*

northwest area before he retired; he has since died of cancer. They could catch their limit of ten trout with no problem. On one of the last times Clarence fished with Bill, they were fishing the Clam River in Burnett County. They saw a large trout rise after insects. Clarence cast with spinning bait, but the trout didn't take it. As he retrieved the line, a brown trout that was over 24 inches in length went right between his legs. "That frightens a person when you don't expect it." That was about 1985.

Fishing has changed in recent years. Forty or fifty years ago, you fished for trout with worms and bait. In recent years, people have changed to using spinning lures and fly-fishing. Spinning bait worked best for Clarence. The biggest fish he's caught were a 24-inch brown trout, a 16-pound muskellunge, and a 15-pound northern pike. There were mostly bluegills and crappies before they stocked the predator fish. "We have larger fish now, and fishing has increased," Clarence said.

Most of the lakes are more fertile now, as a result of development along lakeshores. Lawns wash into the lakes so there are more nutrients in the water. It's not good. The health of the lakes needs to be watched and controlled. Zoning is helping. Clarence described an example. There was a large resort on Yellow Lake in Burnett County. About 30 years ago, a man wrote to the governor's office in Madison complaining about the algae build-up: water was green in the month of August. Clarence was instructed to contact him and check on the quality of the water. Clarence told the man that water quality was a



DNR ARCHIVE



GERALD BARTELT

*As a result of development along lakeshores, more nutrients wash into the lakes, upsetting the health of the lakes.*

result of management of the lakeshore. He pointed out to the man that he ran a resort with outdoor toilets, and the sandy soil let waste run into the water. The man took corrective action and put in a sewage system. "That lake is now one of our popular fishing lakes," Clarence concluded. The entire shoreline is developed.

A dam created a large flowage in the Namekagon River near Trego and changed the entire area. The shoreline is covered with expensive homes. The dam was built about sixty years ago to provide electricity. Originally the river supported a population of smallmouth bass; now it's mainly walleyes because of the depth of the water. Walleyes do better in deeper water. In addition, the dam warms the water. There's not much effect on the river above the flowage; it still supports trout there. But the river can't support trout below the dam any more. The dam contributes to the economy of the area. There's so



*Clarence liked swimming in the sand country lakes when he was a boy. He would still swim there now, though sometimes lakes are closed to swimming because of pollution in the water.*



*A public boat landing won't provide the habitat for fish an undeveloped one will, but overall fishing is still good.*

much development around the dam that Clarence wouldn't consider moving it.

The Clam River in Burnett County boasts another dam. It's just a small power dam for electricity. That area's been popular for development too, Clarence said. The dam on the Clam River near Webster increased the depth of Clam Lake. Clarence said it's one of the most popular fishing lakes in Wisconsin. The dam was constructed to increase the size and depth of the flowage of the lake. Without it, the lake was more of a marshland. A lot of wild rice grows there, and the lake is covered with ducks in the fall. That lake is right on the migration route for ducks flying south from Canada, and it provides important habitat for them. There is more open water there because of the dam, which was built around 1935.

What did Clarence actually do out in the barrens? He set round or hoop nets called fyke nets to trap and move fish to larger lakes. In the 1940s and '50s, they hauled the fish in aerated trucks with oxygen cylinders in the water.

There's been quite a change in fish management. Years ago, before the lakes were developed as they are now, they stocked fish off private property. Now it's all done at public boat landings. A public boat landing won't provide the habitat for fish an undeveloped one will provide. But overall, fishing is good.

Clarence took his sons fishing and they enjoyed it, but they've never picked it up as an activity of their own. They aren't interested in fishing now. One son is an avid golfer; the other pursued a career in the Air Force.

Clarence liked swimming in the sand country lakes when he was a boy. The water was clearer and cleaner. He used to drink water from the lakes when he was fishing. Now the water is cloudy and dark, filled with algae. He wouldn't drink it now or water from Lake Superior either. That water sure was beautiful years ago! He would still swim in the lakes now, though sometimes they are closed to swimming as a result of pollution in the water.

Drainage of septic systems into the water is being eliminated with zoning regulations. Clarence thinks it will still improve more. Water passes through the sandy soil faster and easier than it does through clay soil. Clay will hold water. Houses on a lake in sandy soil have the potential for more damage to water quality than the same number of houses on a lake in clay soil. People need to manage the land better than they have been. Most of the septic systems being built now filter water well.

Clarence wanted to convey the message that more of the land on lakes should be in government ownership. However, he knows there would be public opposition to this.

Water

# Wildlife



DNR ARCHIVE

*Jerry comes to the marshes in the sand country every year to hunt because there are lots of ducks and few duck hunters. Some days the ducks just wouldn't stay out of the decoys.*

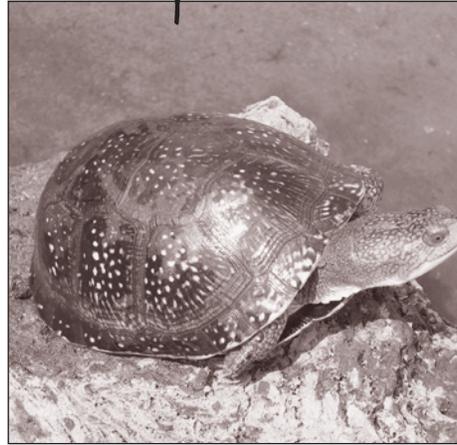
*The sharptails would hoot, inflating their air sacks, stamping their feet, fanning their tails. The booming sound was low-pitched and resonant. It carried for long distances. That booming became an important sound of spring for Bud, an aural symbol proclaiming the new season.*

Wildlife

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# Wildlife



PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST (LEFT), ROBERT HAY (RIGHT)

*Left: Wildlife draws visitors to the area and provides valuable recreation opportunities to both residents and tourists.*

*Right: The Northwest Sands Area is home to several rare or endangered species, such as the Blandings turtle.*

**A**lthough none of the interview questions specifically pertained to wildlife in the barrens, it is interesting to note how many people shared related anecdotes or referenced wildlife in one way or another. Hidden within other contexts, wildlife emerged as a significant topic. Therefore the passages related to wildlife have been lifted out of their original contexts and set down together under this heading of their own. Memories of encounters with wildlife, expressions of appreciation for wildlife, human-wildlife conflicts, and consumptive use of wildlife such as hunting and trapping are the themes that emerged within this category. With several rare/endangered species in the ecosystem, wildlife merits important consideration in creating any management plan for the area. Some of the interviewees mentioned changes they've observed in wildlife populations. Sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens were once more populous, for example. Probably one conclusion we can draw from all this is that people with long-term connections to the Northwest Sands Area generally care about wildlife in the area. Wildlife draws visitors to the area and provides valuable recreation opportunities to both residents and tourists.



**James Orvin Evrard**  
*Born: July 19, 1942*

JIM LIKES THE NORTHWEST SAND country because it's the wildest part of the state. He remembers the first wild wolf he saw. It was at Crex Meadows, during a sharp-tailed grouse census. He felt as though he was being watched. He was. A wolf was watching Jim and his wife. They were both thrilled. Then on a hot July day in 1997, Jim was in Douglas County Wildlife Area looking for blueberries. He saw something that, at first glance, appeared to be a deer sleeping on the edge of a sand road, but it was a wolf and her pups. After the wolves fled, Jim and his wife examined the tracks, which were not 10 yards from the car. When his wife heard what she thought was a wolf, she almost ran back to the car, but it was only a nighthawk diving. The female wolf reappeared and merely watched, then walked into the brush.

Jim has seen some rare birds. Once he drove up on a peregrine falcon plucking and eating a teal. Fishing on the Yellow River, he saw two little blue herons. This was a rare sight because they

were out of their range. Normally he sees grouse and sparrows. He says some of the water birds tend to be decreasing, especially the great blue heron. Nesting cormorants and egrets disappeared with the increase of bald eagles preying on their young. People don't realize the ecological impact of increasing eagle numbers.

Before European settlement, he explained, there were bison in the area, on the edge of the barrens, near St. Croix Falls. There were also elk in the barrens. The Chippewa and the Sioux, who were at war along their overlapping boundaries, generally stayed away from those boundary areas, and there was more evidence of wildlife in those areas as a result.

Sharp-tailed grouse are the only reason we still have the barrens in Wisconsin, Jim said. Wildlife managers fought forestry interests for sharp-tailed grouse habitat, which they managed with fire. Norm Stone, the first manager at Crex Meadows, used fire to manage sharp-tailed grouse and other wildlife habitat. The northwest barrens is the only place in Wisconsin where fire was used to manage sharp-tailed grouse; the sharptails are gone from the northeastern part of the state.



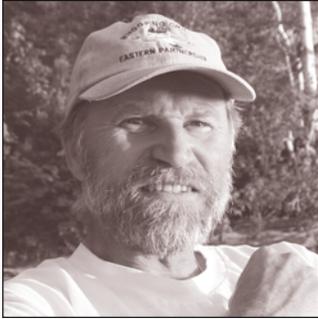
*The sand country is the wildest part of the state. It is thrilling to know that a wolf could be watching.*

DNR ARCHIVE



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*Jim says that sharp-tailed grouse are the only reason we still have the barrens in Wisconsin.*



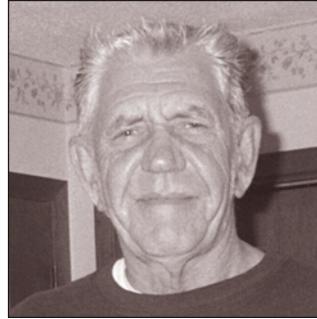
**Gerald Allan Bartelt**  
*Born: July 27, 1950*

JERRY WORKS FOR THE WISCONSIN DNR, in wildlife and forestry research. He lives in the southwest part of the state, near Black Earth. Yet he comes to the marshes in the sand country every year to hunt because there are lots of ducks and few duck hunters. Some days the ducks just wouldn't stay out of the decoys.

Once when he was hunting in the sand country, sandhill cranes flew right over head, just 15–20 yards above. They landed about 20 yards behind where he was sitting. They were extremely loud; the sound of the cranes was really incredible!



*Once sandhill cranes landed about 20 yards behind Jerry. The sound of the cranes was really incredible.*



**Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**  
*Born: July 11, 1934*

BUDDY LIVES IN THE GRANTSBURG area. Once he was driving on the Main Dike Road when he saw a timber wolf go around the corner and into the brush. When Buddy pulled up alongside in his Jeep, the wolf came right down to the Jeep and followed him. Because of this behavior, Buddy wondered if the animal was well. He'd seen a collar on it, so he reported the incident. He figured the biologists would claim it wasn't a true wolf if it was acting strangely, but it was radio-collared so he didn't think it would be a hybrid.

*Once when Buddy was driving, he saw a timber wolf go around the corner and into the brush.*

In the mid 1990s there was a pack of six wolves in the area. One time a wolf was chasing someone's bird dog, but the owner hollered, and the wolf left. The wolves were fighting with people's dogs. The DNR trapped some of the wolves and had to kill one.

Buddy says he hunts everything. They go coon hunting, though his wife, Sena, doesn't consider raccoon edible. There's a place Buddy goes to run the dogs inside a fence, a training place.



**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**

*Born: December 8, 1928*

**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

BEAR AND DEER WERE SCARCE WHEN Don and Lois Shogren were growing up. You were lucky, and it was an occasion, if you saw a deer. Lois said she hadn't seen a wild bear until about ten years ago. Don remembered seeing a bear walk between the house and barn when he was a kid in the 1920s. The bear swatted at the slop pail while Don and his family watched from the window. Nobody went out to do the chores that day.

Lois said you didn't see a goose or crane often then either. She remembers being out in a field, playing ball on a nice fall or spring evening, and seeing the geese fly in front of the moon. To her, the geese represent peace and tranquility and her own closeness to nature. It's still thrilling to see them.

Don remembers the first sandhill crane he saw. It was a rusty-colored thing at the top of the hill. He thought it was a deer. That was in the early 1960s. Lois said it was in the late 1970s when she first heard a crane call. It was such a peculiar call that she couldn't tell what it was until she drove to see it.

Don remembers big harvests of prairie chickens. When he was growing up, he and his brother counted eighty-two prairie chickens in one oak. He hunted them with a shotgun in 1930, when he was eleven or twelve years old. When controlled burning was stopped, prairie chicken habitat was lost.

Fish Lake was the primary duck hunting lake in the area, as Don remembers it. Thirty or forty people would camp out in his dad's pasture. Governor Knowles hunted there at the opening of the season every year. He came from River

Falls in the 1920s and '30s. Don remembers sitting on shore with his brothers on opening day one year. There were ducks in all directions. Incredulously, he watched a pair of teal come down in front of him and then fly all the way around the lake. Everybody shot at them, at least 200 times. The ducks just kept zipping, and then they flew off. Don's hunting partner was wearing a hat with the brim turned up all the way around. He heard a rattling sound and discovered the brim full of pellets. There must have been 200 hunters along that lake! There were limits of fourteen to fifteen ducks at that time. Now Don hunts geese, not ducks.

*To Lois, the geese represent peace and tranquility and her own closeness to nature.*

Don remembers a game warden who worked to stop illegal hunting. He was well respected, according to Don. He didn't make arrests just to make arrests. If you were going to eat the deer, he'd let you eat it, but he wouldn't let you sell it if you got it through illegal hunting.

Some people saw the game wardens as heroes. It was a federal game warden who arrested Al Capone for shooting fish below the Chippewa Dam. Ironically, he was fined for shooting fish, not people! Capone brought notoriety to the land on the edge of the sand country; he had a hideout near Couderay and Hayward.



**Lafayette Connor**

*Born: March 29, 1900*



*Faye has a beaver skull.*

Not all wildlife was popular in the barrens. Don and Lois don't like the gnats and deerflies that characterized the sand country. Don has an allergic reaction to them: if one bites his hand, his eyes swell shut. In the 1920s and '30s, the horse's ears got bloody from bites. They had to put grease on the horse's ears to keep the gnats from biting them. The mosquitoes can get pretty bad in the evenings too. Don and Lois also remember how people built smudges to keep the mosquitoes away, setting the green grass on fire to make smoke. The cows would stand in the smoke to avoid the bugs. Lois remembers having a fire in a pail for the kids to play beside when she was a girl, for the same reason. Don says the gnats were always populous in the pines.



*Fish Lake was one of the primary duck hunting lakes. There were ducks in all directions.*

FAYE'S HERITAGE IS CHIPPEWA AND HIS grandfather was a fur trader. He remembered one time when a beaver felled a popple in water and stripped it of bark. That beaver undercut all three popples there, and the wind blew down first the one and then the others. Faye went with his cousin to trap the beaver. He has a beaver skull: you boil the head in a kettle, then soak the skull in bleach. Now a boy can get paid for killing a beaver, plus the price of the hide, because beavers get into the slough or causeway. "They can cut a hole in the road that'll bury your car. They'll chew up blacktop and gravel."

There weren't many beavers when Faye was a boy. The furbearers had been trapped out. There weren't many deer here then either. Just timber. The lumber crews came for the timber, but in the process they killed a lot of game to feed the crews: deer, bear, moose, raccoons, and rabbits. When he was young, Faye ate partridge, rabbits, prairie chickens, and squirrels.

Since the mid-1800s wild turkeys haven't been available, Faye says. Then somebody sent away for the eggs and raised wild turkeys. About 30 years ago the Conservation Department furnished land for turkeys and made laws to protect them. Yet when he opened the door to his house in Webster recently, startled wild turkeys "flew like mosquitoes" from the yard. Now he goes partridge hunting on old roads kept open by snowmobiles. Even when he lived in Kenosha, he always came back here for deer hunting. Animals are like that too, he said. A nest of wrens comes back every year too.



**Raymond Bergerson**  
*Born: March 4, 1913*

RAY BELONGS TO THE FRIENDS OF Crex Meadows Wildlife Area and makes a donation each year. He likes looking for swans at Crex Meadows; he saw twenty-four the last time he went there in 1998. He used to hunt, but now he just uses binoculars.

Ray said the country was covered with prairie chickens in 1929. They used to be like clouds. They were easy to get with a fishhook in a kernel of corn soaked in alcohol or with a stove pipe set at an angle in the snow so their feet slipped and they couldn't climb back up. As a kid, Ray lived on fried prairie chicken. It was against the law to catch prairie chickens out of season, but his dad and uncle didn't worry about that.

Ray liked to catch flying squirrels too. He'd put out corn for them. When he caught them, he'd carry them in his pocket and let them go. He didn't bring the squirrels home.

When he ran in the sand country as a kid, Ray saw a lot of snowshoe rabbits. Around 1932, he says he had them eating corn out of his hand. But he hasn't seen them for years now, or jack rabbits either. He thinks there are too many cars now for the survival of wildlife.

Ray even had a tame skunk. He'd gotten an old milk can and shovel and dug up the den. He pushed the skunk into the can. A neighbor kid kept the skunk until it disappeared during mating season. Ray used to feed it peanuts and peanut butter from his hand.

Ray remembers when a beaver put in a dam that raised the water level. Now cranes are there. "It's

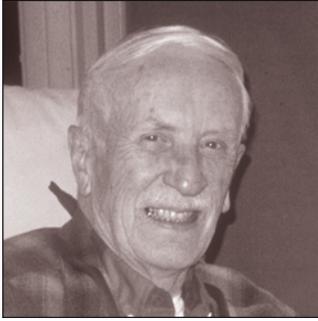


*Ray liked to catch flying squirrels. When he caught them, he'd carry them in his pocket and let them go. He didn't bring the squirrels home.*

the craziest damn bird for hollering," Ray says of cranes. But the foxes and wolves don't go near them because they have dangerous beaks. Once two cranes in the road stopped him. A little chick came out of the grass, and the adults escorted it across the road.

Ray remembers raising turkeys in the 1930s. He loaned money to a guy raising turkeys one year. Then in the Armistice Day Storm of 1940, a lot of turkeys were lost. He only knows of one turkey farmer left now. But his son hears wild turkeys a lot. They're getting them in the Grantsburg area now. Turkeys like acorns.

Today Ray sees lots of wildlife. He watches squirrels steal walnuts, and he feeds them hazelnuts. He watches eagles, geese, swans, and sandhill cranes. He saw fifty-two deer in one day! In his youth, it was rare to see geese. If one came to the lake, you closed the stores, and everyone went to see it. Now they're a nuisance. One cold, windy day there was a shadow over the truck. Snow geese lit on the southeast side. He watched the snow geese until it was too cold, and when he turned the key to start the engine to warm up, they all flew off. They had been eating in a corn field after the corn had been picked. There was always one goose up on the hill, serving as lookout.



**Harold C. (Bud)  
Jordahl, Jr.**

*Born: August 18, 1926*

*Bud came to the  
Northwest Barrens to  
study sharp-tailed grouse.*

GROWING UP IN MINNESOTA, BUD remembers hunting with his dad during the Great Depression years. It was so dry there then that the sunsets were red from the dust in the air and his mother put cloths around the windows to keep the dust out of the house. A lot of farmers were going broke then, but there was some great prairie chicken habitat. He remembers hunting with dogs, early in the fall. They flushed large groups of birds, and they flushed close.

Years later, on a beautiful fall day, Bud hunted sharptails around Solon Springs, Wisconsin, with two setters. It was an exceptionally wonderful experience flushing birds in an open prairie. Watching the dogs work reminded him of hunting with his father in Minnesota.

With a degree in Wildlife Management, Bud came to the northwest barrens to study sharp-tailed grouse between Crex Meadow and Solon Springs in the spring of 1952. Sharptails were not abundant then. He set up transects to revisit at the same time each year. There must have been seventy-five to one hundred sharptails in sight at one time in the Namekagon Barrens. He'd never seen so many at once; it was awesome. He would drive along the transect and stop every half mile to check for the target species. He could really hear the birds. They would hoot, inflating their air sacks, stamping their feet, and fanning their tails. The booming sound was low-pitched and resonant; it carried for long distances. It became one of those important sounds of spring for Bud, an aural symbol proclaiming the new season, as the honking of returning Canada Geese is for some people today.

Once Bud went to watch sharp-tailed grouse “booming” (males dance to attract a mate) in the spring and found an extremely large lek, (a flat, grassy dancing ground used by sharptails or prairie chickens), that had been furrowed to plant jack pine. The furrowed dancing ground was on county forestland, and it was the job of the foresters to grow and harvest trees, not provide habit for sharp-tailed grouse. Foresters controlled 2.3 million acres of county forest, put together from formerly tax delinquent lands. Game biologists fought for small prairies for the sharptails, but foresters and the counties wanted pines. A battle between the game biologists and the foresters ensued, and the controversy became public in the newspapers. Bud conducted an economic analysis regarding sharptails or forests, but he couldn't persuade foresters that sharptails were more valuable than the forests. The county board considered trees more economically important than grouse. Bud would have liked to have seen a mixture of forest and prairie in oak savannas, for production of acorns, firebreaks, aesthetics, and maintenance of some open areas.

Fran and Frederick Hamerstrom's 1952 book *Sharptails into the Shadows?* suggests that jack pines will provide the shadows that will foretell the end of the sharptail. The book states that sharptails are important to Wisconsin's natural heritage. The publicity that the Hamerstroms brought to the prairie chicken issue raised support for open prairie and served to educate a lot of people.



**Robert John Becker**  
*Born: March 26, 1927*

A FREELANCE WRITER WITH A BENT FOR the outdoors, Bob philosophized about hunting and fishing as sport. He's ice-fished since he was ten years old, though he uses a power auger to chop the hole in the ice now. Ice fishing is still a meditative activity; you can watch a coyote run across the ice. "A sport means the end result isn't guaranteed to you; you have to earn it," he explained. If you just go out there on an ATV and shoot a grouse, you don't have any idea what the sport is about. There's a difference between killing and hunting. If you can't find something in the activity besides killing, something like smelling wood smoke or listening to a loon, you aren't doing the sport. If you flush eight grouse and shoot one, that's the way it's supposed to be. The sand country is excellent deer range. It's hunted heavily; it's accessible. The large deer herds are a product of the young vegetative species.



*Bob's ice-fished since he was ten years old, though he uses a power auger to chop the hole in the ice now. Ice fishing is still a meditative activity; you can watch a coyote run across the ice.*



**Lyndon Arthur Smith**  
*Born: February 1, 1913*

THE SOUND OF A COYOTE HOWLING IS nothing new to Lynny. He remembers hearing them howl when he was a boy, walking home from school in the late afternoon.

When he was a young man, Lynny worked in the lumber camp. Somebody had to watch the lumber camp on weekends when the rest of the crew went home, and, because he was the youngest, Lynny was frequently elected. He'd walk down the old skid tracks and logging roads, looking for bear or deer tracks, just for something to do. He saw a bear once. It turned and ran, and he was mighty glad it did. He'd never seen a bear before, and he didn't know what it might do. There were few deer there then, but he could listen to the coyotes. The porcupines chewed on everything. You couldn't leave a tool such as an axe lying around on the ground; they'd chew on the handle.

Later, around 1929, Lynny bought \$10 of groceries to take to a friend's trapping shack between Minong and Hayward. Ten dollars of groceries was more than could be carried in one trip; it would last a while. Though he spent all winter at the shack, he never saw a deer track. The snow was deep. In the early fall he trapped muskrats, until everything froze up. Then they played cards and threw knives. They saw lots of snowshoe rabbits and partridges, which they shot with a 22 for meat. There were lots of prairie chickens in the old days. They sounded like they were saying "You old fool!" There were quail too. He didn't hunt prairie chickens; he loved the sound of them.



**Kay Ramel Karras**  
*Born: June 19, 1918*

KAY WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE barrens. She remembers seeing prairie chickens forty years ago, but not now. People who want prairie chickens and grouse to be able to live there don't want trees. Prairie chickens have to take a running flight; they need space, she said. On her farm there used to be many birds. You seldom see a brown thrush now, she says. The town sprayed DDT or something to kill the brush. She used to see meadowlarks too, but never does now. There used to be lots of bluebirds, then there were none. Now occasionally she sees them. She's put up bluebird boxes.

Kay was a "tomboy" when she was a kid. She shot gophers with a 22 and she shot crows for twenty-five cents.

Kay remembers hearing a bobcat scream when she was a kid. There's a bobcat crossing on her land now.

Kay acknowledged she has mixed emotions about wolves, though she knows there are some in the area now. In the 1970s, she bottle-raised a calf. In the fall, she took it back from the house to be with the herd. It was there for no more than a month when a wolf got it. She said she'd seen the wolf by the barn, but she couldn't prove it so she never got any compensation. Last year she saw two wolves in her field. Her grandchildren used to walk through there where the wolf had been seen. When they were younger, she'd tell them not to, but now it's okay because they're bigger.

Deer have been a problem. Kay said they built a wider median, separating two lanes in the road for the deer. They built double lanes through part of the area about ten years ago.



**Helen Rein**  
*Born: October 9, 1918*

HELEN WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE barrens. She said she heard wolves howl when she was a kid. She ran into the house, scared.

Helen's dad was a logger and a farmer. He also rented boats to the fishermen who came on vacation. President Coolidge came there, and his group rented a boat. Helen waded into the water to catch frogs for his bait.

Besides catching frogs for bait, Helen also made money by trapping gophers for five cents each. The people in the town wanted to get rid of them because the gophers ruined crops and dug holes in the fields. She was paid per tail. She used a leg-hold trap to catch them, and a dog to dig them out. She'd set a stake with a white flag on it so she could see where the traps were. She'd check them all day long until she had to bring the cows home. Helen said her brothers shot muskrats, and she helped skin and stretch the hides too.

Helen's mom raised pheasants and grouse on which to run dogs for field trials. Generally the winters are too harsh here for pheasants, Helen said. The field trials still happen, but not as many people come as used to.



*Kay sees bluebirds occasionally now. She's put up bluebird boxes.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Albert Lorin Lord**

*Born: March 24, 1931*

**Gladys Lord Sampson**

*Born: August 23, 1911*

AL TOLD THE STORY OF THE TIME HIS great-great-grandpa Osagee, a chief of the Fond du Lac Band of Chippewa (Ojibwa), and his wife were out in a canoe in Lake Superior when a moose came by. He tied a rope on the moose's antlers and had the moose pull him to shore. Water splashed into the canoe and got the flintlock all wet. The moose kept on going through the woods, pulling the canoe and all. They finally fell out of the canoe on the land, and the moose took off. They got back their stuff that had been in the canoe, but the canoe itself was broken. (I admit, I've heard this story in the context of a Northwoods legend. History or legend, it's still a good tale!)

Al said he could see twenty-five to thirty prairie chickens in a flock before all the trees were planted. Now they're gone. There are just partridges, sharptails, and, occasionally, pheasants. They used to take their guns in an old convertible and go out on the sand trails, the fire lanes. When they saw the tracks, they'd load the guns and walk into the brush where the tracks led. They'd flush the birds and "boom-ta-boom."



*Al could see twenty five to thirty prairie chickens in a flock before all the trees were planted. Now they are gone.*

*They'd flush the birds and  
"boom-ta-boom."*

But prairie chickens fly further than pheasants and they have a lookout bird on top of a tree to warn them.

Al explained that there are black squirrels there now because someone brought them from Ohio and Indiana. His house carries the markings of other wildlife. A bear wanting sunflower seeds knocked the latticework down. He showed me where there had been a pair of beaver in the pond. Al said there have been wolves, cougar, and elk nearby.

Al's grandpa lived on the east side of the lake. A deer came through. Grandpa saw the tracks in the morning and followed it about 20 miles, shot it, and dragged it back. That was the last deer in Douglas County for a while. You didn't need a license to hunt in the 1890s; that came later. The deer came later too.

Men killed deer every weekend to feed their families in the Great Depression. In court the Judge told the warden to leave the Indians alone, so the warden overlooked their hunting. One warden, McNaughton, would shoot a deer for any family in need. Al would listen for the shot and go help his Uncle Andy clean up the deer. They'd pull up a block of ice from the ice-house, pull out a washtub, put the meat in the tub, put boards on top, and put the block of ice back on it again. "We learned more about nature, fishing, and hunting," Gladys said.



**Alexander (Ike)  
Louis Gokee**

*Born: December 29, 1918*

Al doesn't like bear hunters because he says they use dogs, not sportsmanship. He also doesn't like the fact that people buy land and post it with "No Trespassing" signs. He prefers that the state and paper company keep the land so he can go hunting on it.

Al's aunt, Gladys Sampson, agrees. Her boys have had the same experience. The places they used to hunt have been marked "No Hunting." In Wisconsin, the Chippewa won a fight for treaty rights. They have the right to hunt anywhere in ceded lands.

Gladys used to go fishing with Al's mother. One time they were fishing on Lake St. Croix. They fished with a cane pole. They put the fish they caught in the bottom of the boat, which might have been fine, except that when they went to step out of the boat, Al's mom tipped it over, and they lost all the fish. Luckily, they met Albert Butcher. He gave them some of his fish so they went home acting as if they had caught all those fine fish. Gladys did catch a three pound bass one time. Al says the fishing has changed. He used to be able to catch one hundred bluegills, but now he couldn't catch that in a week of fishing.

Al talked about the dog field trials at the bird sanctuary in Douglas County Wildlife Management Area. There are a lot of blue ribbon dogs buried there: bird dogs, setters, springers, pointers, labs. Competitions were held for how long a dog could hold, etc. The participants didn't actually shoot the birds, but Al came by later, after the dogs and owners left, and he shot the birds.

IKE REMEMBERS ONE TIME HE CHASED a gopher. It ran under a log, and when he put his hand under there to try to reach it, it bit him. He didn't put his hand under there any more. There were lots of gophers in the sand country. They're about the size of chipmunks. You can see badger mounds too, he said, but he never saw a badger.

Ike hunted all over the area. He hunted deer. Chippewa himself, he said it wasn't illegal for the tribes to hunt in the 1930s. Besides deer, he also hunted partridge, grouse, and rabbits.

*There were lots of gophers in the sand country. They're about the size of chipmunks.*

*Al's house carried the markings of wildlife.  
A bear knocked the latticework down.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

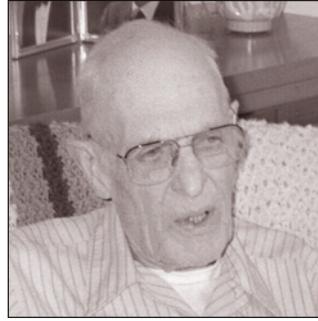


**Lolita Spooner Taylor**  
*Born: July 19, 1908*

LOLITA TOLD ME OF THE OJIBWA creation. Out of nothing the Creator made rock, water, fire, wind, giving each a spirit of its own. Out of rock he created the earth, and gave it the power of growth and healing. On the earth he formed the mountains, plains, valleys, and islands. He made the plant beings: flowers, grasses, trees, and vegetables. To each he gave the spirit of life, growth, and beauty. He created the animals: four-leggeds, winged, crawlers, and swimmers. Last of all, he made man. Last in order of creation and least in bodily powers, man had the power of vision. Gitchee Manitou made all things for harmony, and the people are part of that natural harmony. The Ojibwa people felt themselves a part of nature. When they killed an animal, they thanked its spirit. They made use of everything.

Once Lolita's brother-in-law killed a deer and didn't use it all. Without refrigeration, part of it rotted. Because he wasted some of the deer that year, he figured he wouldn't be able to get a deer the next year, and he didn't, though he tried.

Lolita has an old ledger from her uncle, who was a Justice of the Peace. She showed me some entries. In April, 1915, one of the first game wardens caught Win Taylor, who lived on the Clam River, with a muskrat out of season. Win was a full-blooded Indian and had the right to take the muskrat, but people were ignorant of the treaty. Win was put in jail because he couldn't pay the fine and court costs of \$44.80. He had a big family and no provisions were made for them. They ate muskrats. In October 1917, Fred Anderson was caught pursuing ducks without a hunting license. He had to pay a total of \$54.15.



**William R. Mason**  
*Born: September 8, 1923*

WHEN BILL WAS GROWING UP IN THE Grantsburg area, there weren't nearly as many wild animals as there are now. There was no bow season on deer. It was a novelty to see a deer. There weren't enough deer to consider them pests, except when the deer harvested soybeans. He never saw a bear all those years. There were some, but they weren't plentiful. There were some partridges, grouse, wolves, coyotes, bobcats, and foxes. He saw foxes out with the cattle. But when you walk in the woods, the animals hear you first, and they get out of the way, so you don't see them much.

Bill hated the wood ticks, mosquitoes, bugs, and gnats. He said some years the mosquitoes were so bad, you couldn't even pick blueberries. He used citronella, a yellow oil, to keep the mosquitoes away. They used a barn spray for the cattle, and they sprayed their own clothes with it. This was before DDT. DDT was good to get rid of bugs; it stayed there in the rain. Bill said his dog had Lyme disease, thanks to the ticks.

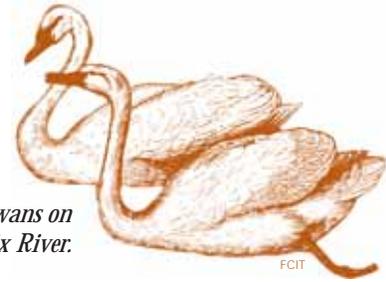


*Bill saw foxes out with the cattle. But when you walk in the woods, the animals hear you first, and they get out of the way, so you don't see them much.*

DNR ARCHIVE



**Dorothy Frosch**  
*Born: March 1, 1916*



*Dorothy sees swans on  
the St. Croix River.*

DOROTHY LIVES ON A LAKE NEAR Wascott. Once there was an eagle's nest right outside, on the peninsula. She liked to watch the eagles out her kitchen window while she did the dishes.

One time when her kids were little, they were playing outside by the dock with her son's puppy, Cindy. She told them to bring Cindy up, but they didn't so she went to see what was happening. Cindy was in a rowboat. She picked up the puppy and walked under the birch tree. An eagle swooped right down – that eagle had its eye on the puppy. Those baby eagles were saying, "Feed me! Feed me!"

One time Dorothy was watching out her window, and she saw a bear come out of hibernation. Under a white pine, it stretched just like a human. The snow was deep, but there was a warm sun that day. The bear held the tree branch like a baby's bottle and nibbled on it. All the neighbors came to watch. The bear was there for six or seven days, then it disappeared.

Another time, when she was coming home from work, she saw a mom and three baby bears in a place where it's real steep. It would be a great place to toboggan there. You can always be entertained in the sand country when you look outside, she says. Dorothy says she doesn't know her birds as well as she used to, but she doesn't see water birds or shorebirds, such as bitterns, as much as she used to. However, she does see swans on the St. Croix River. They're gorgeous! Once there were twelve to fifteen. She saw six in the summer of the interview (1998).

Dorothy thinks we're getting more wildlife over the years. As many as seventeen deer come in to eat. She feeds them. She sees them in herds more than she used to. At dusk you can ride around and look for them. One time there was a whole mess of albino deer. People killed them off as trophies. It was a thrill to see the albinos. She also commented that there are a lot more beaver around than there were ten years ago.

Dorothy used to feed the ducks. But then it was impossible to convince them to move in the fall and duck hunters talked about the fat ducks they were getting. Dorothy says no ducks will be fed by her again!

Dorothy's husband Bill used to hunt, but he gave it up. Once when he was deer hunting, he was enjoying watching a doe. A bullet zinged past his head and hit the doe. The hunter came up and said "Oh, a doe" in disappointment, and left it lying there. Bill was so disgusted by this performance that he quit hunting. Dorothy says it's a sea of orange here with hunters now. They all love their venison, except her; she'd rather eat beef.

Tony Jelich, a DNR Warden, showed Dorothy her first bear. The bear had been hanging out at Kay's Tavern, where it was considered a pest, so someone shot it. Tony showed her the dead bear and she bawled. It was their fault, she said; people kept the garbage out where it attracted the bear.

Dorothy hates raccoons. She has a lot of hummingbirds and used to put out sugar water for them. But the coons carry the nectar feeders away so she can't find them. She finally had to stop feeding the hummingbirds.



**William Soderbeck**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Alice Johnson Soderbeck**

*Born: October 6, 1914*

BILL REMEMBERED HOW THE HAYSTACKS used to be covered with prairie chickens. But there are no farms up there any more, and with no farms, there are no sharptails either. Sharptails can't live in jack pine. People can clearcut or burn to make the area into prairie, and the DNR can plant crops to help the sharptails, but unless it's farmed like it was before, the sharptails won't have the corn shocks for shelter and the corn for food. The disappearance of farms has affected pheasants too. They used to get grit under the cornstalks; now they just get it from the road and they get hit by cars.

The land is getting broken into small parcels, Bill said. There are too many people. There's no place for the deer to range. Bill doesn't like clearcutting either. When you cut off the oaks and replant pines, there are no acorns left for the deer. But we do have turkeys around now, he observes.

When Bill was a kid, the river was full of sunken logs that jammed, filled with sand, and became little islands. Ice and water broke them up. There are fewer fish there than there used to be; the logs made good spawning sites, but those are gone now. The river is now full of sheepheads and redhorse suckers. In the 1950s, Bill caught lots of walleyes in the river, but it's not that easy any more. Advertising the area for recreation has brought hundreds of canoes here. You don't have to catch many fish per person to cut fish populations down. In the days where they were sawing

lumber, there were dead heads (logs) by the shore. Rock bass were there then, though there are none right there now. Sturgeon are also scarce now, and you need a tag for them. Bill quit spearing them years ago; he used to be able to spear them, but he can't legally now.

Just about three miles up river, near the mouth of the Kettle River, Bill enjoyed his best fishing trip ever in 1998, the year of the interview. He caught two bass, 19 and 20 inches, plus three others over 14 inches long.

Bill started hunting when he was thirteen years old. He still hunts deer, but he quit hunting ducks. He just lost interest.

Bill trapped skunks around 1935. He trapped them along the river. He used a hook and a long pole to trap and carry the skunk to the water and drown it. Then the skunk didn't spray. He could get \$6-7 per skunk. They used the skunk fur for fur collars. The more white in the fur, the cheaper

*Sharptails can't live in jack pine, but people can clearcut or burn to create prairie habitat.*

*Bill trapped skunks. They used the skunk pelts for fur collars.*



LEFT: COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS, RIGHT: ROBERT QUEEN

Bill got about \$15 for a raccoon, \$35-40 for a mink.

it was considered. Otter was the prettiest fur. He caught everything, dried the pelt, and sold it. He got about \$15 for a raccoon, \$35–40 for a mink. You could make good money trapping in winter. With warm cars and houses, people don't need fur coats much now, and fake fur is cheaper.

One morning Bill was leaving for work. The tall grass waved goodbye. Alice was getting dressed when she heard a “clunking” on the steps. A skunk was on the steps. The clunking was caused by a brown Hershey's cocoa can that was stuck on its head. Alice had poured bacon grease in the can, which had lured the skunk. She'd left the grease-filled can in the dump. How the skunk found it's way the 1/4 mile from the dump to the house, she'll never know. She went in the house, came out with a rifle, and shot the skunk with a 22. Bill told the people in town what happened, and a photographer took her picture holding the dead skunk. It was in the Grantsburg, St. Paul, and West Coast papers.

That wasn't the only skunk Alice shot on the steps. Once during a February thaw a skunk came out, and the dog had it cornered under the car. The skunk came out from under the car and went on the step. Alice was cold and wanted her coat, so she shot the skunk right there on the step. It smelled a long time.

One time Bill said the dog killed five skunks. Bill had a good flashlight; he could see what he was doing. Since he wasn't near the skunks, he didn't think he smelled, but he took off his clothes and bathed anyway. To his surprise, his wife woke up and said he smelled.

## Ron Oaks

*Born: November 14, 1937*

## Chad Oaks

*Born: July 21, 1971*

RON AND CHAD WERE TAGGING A DEER when I talked to them briefly at Crex Meadows. Ron has lived in the area since 1967, and Chad returns every year to hunt.

Chad remembered his first hunt. He was bow hunting. He saw a little forked buck on the edge of the field and shot it with the third shot.

Ron said the land hasn't changed much since the mid-1960s—it's always good hunting. But Chad noted that there are more and more people. That's why he bought land. Ron hopes the Wisconsin DNR will tell people to stay off private property. The trespassers are mostly people from out of town. But that's why you get your own land, so you don't have to let others on it.

Ron remembered the first time he came here, around 1965. He said he'd never seen so many deer in his life. He'd hunted in Minnesota before, but it was hard to see the deer there. Chad said there used to be bear on his land, but he doesn't see them any more because people run their dogs to hunt bear there.



*Hunters bring deer they've harvested to Crex Meadows to be tagged. Many remember their first hunt.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Betty Donis  
Lockert Hanson**

*Born: January 18, 1934*

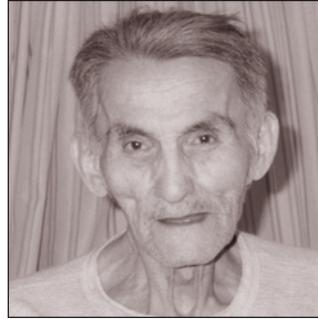
BETTY OWNS A HUNTING CABIN NEAR Fish Lake; she said there are no fish in Fish Lake, but there are lots of ducks and geese. The governor has duck hunted there.

She's never hunted, but Betty has always loved hunting season. When the hunters came, they played cards with her dad. Her mom was everybody's Nanna. She'd bring frosted cinnamon rolls in a pan to the hunting camp.

The quarts of venison her mother canned were important for survival. Although she wouldn't approve of it now, her father probably took some deer out of season during the Great Depression and felt he had the perfect right. He could always get a deer when they needed one. Although they were poor in other ways, at least they were never hungry. But it made her mother nervous because they couldn't afford to have any fines.

Betty has sold a lot of her land to the Wisconsin DNR. She's happy to see some crops for wildlife. It must be tough for some of the deer now. Her sons don't want more hunters there. It's wild country with difficult hunting. You have to work for your deer, and her sons love it. As we spoke, in November 1998, she said there were four deer hanging there as evidence.

Betty likes to take long walks with her granddaughter. She likes to walk down the hill and follow the St. Croix River on the path. It's pretty and peaceful there in the spring. You can't walk there in summer though; the bugs are too bad.



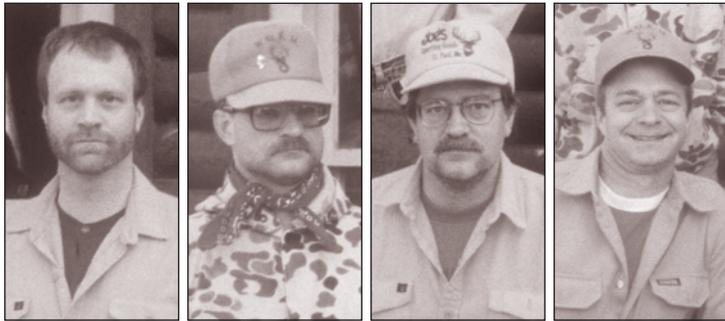
**Franklin Basna**

*Born: June 25, 1914*

WHILE FRANK TALKED ABOUT MAKING things from his Chippewa heritage, he also made some observations about wildlife. He noted that the forests were nice when he was a boy, but now forestland is all cutover. He used to go out and peel birch bark, but now you can't find big birch trees. "When you log off like that," Frank explained, "you lose your animals too. Now you can't even find a rabbit." He used to like to eat snowshoe rabbits with vegetables and dumplings; now you can't find them. There are some rabbits around, but they are cottontails. The fishers kill the rabbits and porcupines. There used to be fishers here long ago, but they were killed off. There were no fishers here a few years ago, but people "planted" them. Now fishers are killing the rabbits, porcupines, and other smaller animals, and people are trapping fishers again.



*There were no fishers here a few years ago, but people restored them to the area.*



**Thomas Richard Johnson**

*Born: December 29, 1962*

**Andrew Paul Johnson**

*Born: December 18, 1957*

**Daniel Wayne Johnson**

*Born: September 8, 1956*

**David Eric Johnson**

*Born: November 21, 1954*

I MET WITH THE JOHNSON BROTHERS, four sons of Berdella and Glen Johnson, at their hunting cabin outside of Grantsburg. It was November 25, 1998, in the thick of hunting season. Although they live in different places now, they come back to this area to hunt every year. Andy said they felt lost hunting in Minnesota, but here they know the land.

When they were boys, they liked to plink around with their 22s. They had the inclination to shoot frogs and varmints. Dan told me he started hunting at age 14. Once when he was hunting grouse, he saw a badger and shot it. It snorted, ran around, dug a hole and backed in. With multiple shots from a shotgun, he finally killed it. Then he felt remorse and fear. He would never shoot a badger now, but at the time, he piled brush over the dead animal and swore secrecy. Now, when they shoot a deer, they have the ritual of telling the story.

David and Andy remembered their first hunts. "Sitting on a road freezing my butt off at 4:30 a.m. was no fun," David explained. "The first hunts stunk," Andy agreed. Dan explained that the people in the metropolitan area by the Twin Cities reject you if you hunt; they equate it with killing. David explained that it's more of a social and food-gathering tradition for him and his brothers.

David said you certainly see more deer than you did twenty years ago, though there's less farming. People view the sand country as a recreation area. Some people commute, though more and more homes are being built there. In the area where they used to snowmobile, across the river, there must be 100 houses, where there used to be

none. Andy added that we don't need more roads out there either; all the roads destroy habitat.

The brothers suggested zoning as a useful tool to enhance waterfowl production in swampy areas. They figured controlled burning, done judiciously, is generally good for deer habitat. However, they were not very comfortable with the way clearcutting is used as a management tool; they called it "higgledy piggledy".

The brothers thought having public land next door was like a guarantee that their property would remain good hunting land. One day when they arrived from their different places to hunt together, according to their tradition, they were shocked by what they found. The adjoining public land had been clearcut. Many years later, they still expressed disappointment.

The brothers hunt mostly on public land so they feel powerless. "We don't own the land. Someone else makes the decisions." Tom thought an explanation of what they're doing on public land would help. Andy summed up saying what we need is a strategy to get input from people regarding the management of public land.



*Now when they shoot a deer, they have a ritual of telling a story.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Nina May Coos Wicklund**

*Born: March 3, 1919*

**Betty Irene Coos Magnuson**

*Born: October 6, 1920*

NINA AND HER SISTER BETTY LIKED TO wade in a ditch and catch tadpoles. One time they were riding a horse across the ditch, but when the horse went up the other side of the ditch, the two girls slid off. They were riding the big workhorse to the mailbox, but once they got off, they couldn't get back on. They had to walk back.

Nina trapped gophers and earned twenty-five cents for each gopher. She set her traps in an abandoned field that was alive with gophers. She'd tie a white rag on a weed to mark the place she set her trap. She lost a lot of traps when the wind blew the weeds down. The gophers would bury the traps or dig them up. With an ax, she'd chop off the gopher's head. She'd put it in a big pail of salt until she had a pail full. Then she took them to the town clerk. They smelled bad! Her mother made her buy a hat with \$3 of the money she earned.

Nina hunted and ate squirrels and rabbits until the rabbits got a disease in the 30s. She didn't get to hunt deer because they just had one gun, and her dad took that. She drove the deer to her dad. She became a deer hunter herself after she was married. In fact, she said she was going hunting early the next morning the night we talked.

Betty and Nina both enjoy the wildlife at Crex Meadows; however, Nina said that she is concerned about nesting birds and animals when they burn the area.



**Catherine Jones Strharsky**

*Born: October 6, 1922*

**Joseph Strharsky**

*Born: August 14, 1923*

KATIE AND JOE MOVED TO THE AREA because Joe likes the lakes and the fishing, the big, open spaces, the deer and bear. Bears eat the juneberries that grow there. The deer come for the acorns. As a kid, he hunted them here.

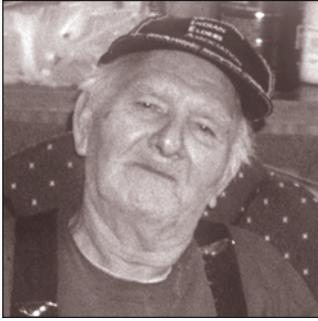
One time Joe and his brother and some friends were in a big hunting party. They spread out and drove the frightened deer towards the shooters. It had been farming country with old fences. A deer jumped the fence, and a kid shot it. The deer fell down dead, but none of them could ever find the bullet hole. They figured that deer died of fright.

Joe figured the sand country hasn't changed much, except he said there's less woods. The places he hunted have been cutover. Popple grew there, and the deer eat it. The paper company cuts, then replants trees.

Everybody feeds the deer, Katie said. One woman sets her alarm when her husband is out of town, so she can feed the deer at the same time her husband usually does: 5:00 a.m. "You just have to cough and the deer come."



Joe gets bluebirds and purple martins in his birdhouses. He cleans them out every year. The year I interviewed him, there were eggs and a bird skeleton in there. But he's had bluebirds in two nests.



**Michael Newago**

*Born: November 2, 1918*

**Veronica (Babe) Newago**

*Born: June 18, 1935*

MIKE GREW UP CHIPPEWA, IN RED CLIFF. His wife Veronica, or Babe, joined in the conversation we had in their kitchen.

Mike remembered several wildlife encounters.

Other times, when he was working on pulpwood, bears would come to get his lunch. Mike would stand right there and the bear would go on past. "I just kissed him," Mike said. The bear would stand and look and crouch down and creep. Bears used to come to the burning barrel, where people burned meat packaging, etc. They poured Clorox in the burning barrel, so now they don't see any bears around it. There were many bears around just a couple of years ago. When it got too dry to burn at the dump any more, the dump was closed. The bears couldn't find much to eat, so they came right into town looking for garbage. One time Mike was hunting at night when he came face to face with a bear. "We kissed each other," he said. The bear fell over backwards and ran away when Mike let out a whoop. That's how he scared it.

*There are no grouse or prairie chickens to hunt any more, Mike said.*

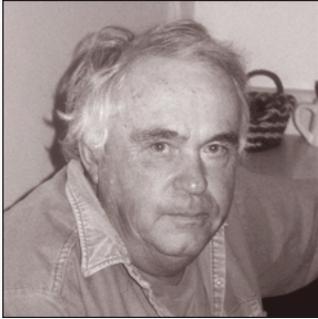
One time he was cutting pulpwood when he ran into a beehive. He ran home, throwing his clothes off as he ran to get rid of the bees. He ran home naked.



*The bear fell over backwards and ran away when Mike let out a whoop. That's how he scared it.*

DNR ARCHIVE

Mike said there used to be more deer in the barrens years ago. You'd see thirty to forty in a herd. "We lived on deer and fish." Mike said, "I killed a lot of deer!" One time he says he killed seven or eight deer. He says he shot every one in the eye. He said he was great with a gun. He says he used a 22 a lot. One time he even killed a bear with it by shooting it right in the eye. He says he'd put the seven to eight deer on a horse and haul them out. He'd take them home and tell the people that, if they wanted deer meat, they should come and get it. He learned this from his dad: "Kill the deer and feed the people." They also used to hunt partridge, prairie chickens, rabbits, and grouse for food. There are no grouse or prairie chickens to hunt any more, Mike said.



**Walter (Buck) Follis**

*Born: June 6, 1939*



*Buck got to know where coyotes went by noticing their tracks.*

BUCK HAS LIVED ALL HIS LIFE IN THE sand country. When he was growing up, there was more open country. He said he used to hunt sharp-tailed grouse and deer in open country. Before his time, at the turn-of-the-century, hunters shot many sharptails and kept the cookstove right there and ready for canning the birds on the spot.

Buck hunted sharptails in the sand country with his dad and his uncles when he was a kid in the 1950s. He has photos showing many sharptails he shot.

Then, after the fires, the sharptails became fewer and fewer, due to reforestation. They almost disappeared. The last time he killed a sharp-tailed grouse was about thirty years ago. There were so few that he didn't feel good about it. He probably won't ever go sharptail hunting again.

There were budworm outbreaks several years before the interview, and loggers cut a lot of trees to salvage the wood before it was destroyed. Sharptails came back where the logging was, but Buck figured their return would probably only last about ten years, because much has already been replanted with trees. You can hunt sharptails under a permit system now.

"Most of us who live here are for logging, for timber; most made a living at that," Buck said, "but we'd also like to see it managed for sharptails. We'd get more songbirds and wildflowers back too."

Buck spoke of the scrub oaks in the sand country. He said that scrub oaks are good for grouse, deer, and blue jays, with their small acorns. He

said you don't necessarily have acorns every year. You tend to get a bumper crop of acorns after a drought or a disturbance. "We don't have the scrub oak we used to have," he said. After big fires in the 1970s, jack pines are now thick west of Minong, almost to Gordon; their serotinous cones only open under intense heat. He's looked for Kirtland warblers there because it's the right sized jack pine to serve as habitat for the endangered birds. Buck spent much of his youth hunting and trapping. He trapped coyotes in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. The Northwest Sands Area wasn't used much by people then. He trapped alone. He got to know where coyotes went by noticing their tracks, and he set traps there. He used coyote urine or a chunk of meat for bait. Where one coyote has urinated, the next one will too, he explained. In those days there was no law, but he tried to check his traps every day. If he found a coyote in a trap, he shot it, took it home, and skinned it. He could earn \$75–80 per



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*The small acorns of scrub oaks are good for grouse, deer, and blue jays, but Buck says we don't have the scrub oak we used to have.*

## *Wolves have come back to the Namekagon Barrens.*

pelt. The fur was used to trim coats and jackets. He sold the coyote hides until 1979 or '80.

Then the fur market crashed. Now people with dogs use the barrens, and he wouldn't feel comfortable trapping there. The people are different too. Some harbor anti-trapping attitudes. If you caught someone's dog in a trap, there'd be trouble. There's still room for people to trap there, and some still do; it's just that the attitudes are different now, and fur prices are lower. Trapping is a wildlife management tool. He said there are lots of coyotes in the barrens now. The only time you see a fluctuation in the population is when there's a disease.

Buck knew there was a pack of wolves between Solon Springs and Highway 27, though he concedes they've only been there for the last couple of years. They've trapped wolves for research on the Namekagon Barrens. Buck still traps some problem wolves for the wolf biologist.

Buck likes the barrens because of the hunting and the freedom. He hopes some open country will remain for wildlife. There are no restrictions on hunting or trapping on Mosinee Paper land, but he worries about when the land may be sold to private ownership. If it weren't owned by Mosinee, the land would likely be broken up into small tracts with people living there. The individual landowners would probably post the land against trespassers and hunt there themselves. When he was growing up, Buck hardly ever saw a "No Trespassing" sign. Now most people post their land. It's important to Buck to keep the barrens public so it remains open to public use. People live in the area because they like hunting,



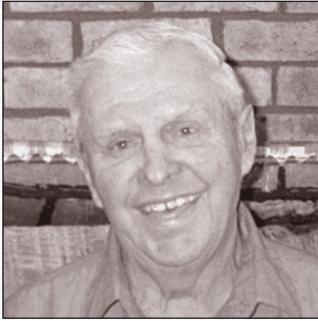
EUNICE PADLEY

snowmobiling, etc. Buck would like to see the DNR buy more land there to keep it public.

When Buck was young, they lived off what they could kill year round. The warden would warn them before coming out their way. When his kids were young, he took them hunting and trapping in the sand country too. One boy shot his first deer there. Buck put him in the stand. When he heard the shot he came back. The boy had a deer lying there, felled by one shot through the neck. It was pretty exciting! Out of five kids, only one has moved away; the rest have remained close by.

Buck told me about a wealthy sportsman friend from Massachusetts. He told stories of just walking outside to hunt and fish. Now you can't find those little streams; they're gone. The sportsman had to move back to Massachusetts. After living here, he really didn't want to. The fellow died a few years after that. He and his wife had smoked without filters, and he died of cancer.

Buck only bought the place he lived in three years before I interviewed him. He bought it from a ninety-six-year-old woman who must have lived there a long time. With 47 acres, Buck was sure he could already get double what he paid for it. Buck planted clover there for deer. He's seen snowshoe hares in his yard. The snowshoes are coming back, he says. There never were many cottontails here.



**Russell Lester Connor**

*Born: March 1, 1923*

OVER THE YEARS, RUSS, WHO RUNS A filling station in Webster, has accumulated some memories about wildlife in the area. When he was younger, he fished for trout with his father and grandfather. They fished the Namekagon River where the steel bridge is, Pearl Brook Creek, and Dogtown. They caught nice brook trout. But now, Russ says, beaver have taken their toll, and the trout fishing there is not so good. They used to fry the fish they caught. They ate by the campfire. He remembers his dad calling wolves, and the wolves answering.

When I asked about hunting in the sand country, Russ showed me a set of antlers. He'd killed a big buck with "big horns" with drop tines. Sheradon Gregg, a game warden from Minnesota had 5,000 deer antlers, but none with drop tines this long. Sheradon was a big burley guy who chewed snuff. He was always trying to buy these "horns" from Russ. Russ said the buck weighed 216 pounds with his legs cut off.

Russ still remembers the first deer he saw, when he was six or seven, in about 1929. He saw it in the Namekagon Barrens. There weren't many deer around then. They were over-harvested by market hunters. One fellow he knew killed large numbers of deer and sold them to people in Chicago. He hunted at night with a light on his cap. Once Russ said the fellow killed five deer, well, maybe two with one shot. He was using buckshot, and the deer were clustered. Still, compare the one deer Russ saw as a boy to the 6,400 deer harvested in Burnett County in 1998!

Russ reminisced about his ancestors. One ancestor was a Civil War veteran named Horace Carsley. One time Horace walked to the Apple River and found a bear den. He poked into the den with his muzzle-loader and a cub came out. He shot it. Another cub came out, and he shot it too. Next a yearling bear emerged, and he shot it too. Finally the old female came out, and his gun wasn't loaded. Horace hit her hard on the nose with his long barreled muzzle-loader. He broke her nose, and she went back into the den. Horace reloaded and shot her when she came out again.

Grandpa Connor, on the other hand, had a tame bear. It lived in the yard and wrestled with the dogs. But as the bear got older, he got more troublesome. He came in the house, a regular old pet. But he got bigger and wasn't to be trusted. One time Grandpa came home to find all the



*Russ showed me a set of antlers from a big buck he'd killed.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



women out in the yard. The bear was on the rampage in the house. It tipped over the cupboard and ate all the honey and jelly, then crawled into a big tree and went to sleep on a limb. Grandpa got a gun and shot him.

In a telephone conversation January 2, 2002, Russ talked about his objection to one legal practice among some Wisconsin hunters. He hates to see a man feed the deer corn and then, come hunting season, stand there with a high powered rifle and shoot the trusting deer. Russ is concerned that young hunters will not learn the art of hunting if this is their experience, and he objects to “the unfairness” of the practice. If you’re not seeing any deer on your land, your neighbor’s probably got a huge corn pile. If you want to see any deer at your place, you have to do the same. Russ said that the practice of baiting “is infectious.” It spreads. One fellow was feeding some weak fawns. They probably lived through the harsh winter because of his intervention, when they probably wouldn’t have survived if left alone in nature. This retention of the weak can affect the larger herd.

One time Russ was bow hunting. He was on his way to the tree stand when he came upon a magnificent eight-point buck. He wasn’t ready to shoot, so Russ looked down to get his shooting glove. When he looked up, the deer was closer to him than it had been before. Right then he christened it “Bucky”. It was a deer that had been tamed. It would walk up to anyone. It followed Russ to his tree stand. Word got around among Russ’ friends not to shoot the deer. It would have been too easy a mark. That deer followed Russ “like a kitten.”

## Eugene Connor

*Born: July 25, 1928*

GENE IS LAFAYETTE CONNOR’S SON.

He grew up in Chicago, but he spent his summers on the farm outside Webster, in the northwest sand country. He spent those summer days in the “back eighty”, following cows or amusing himself. He had responsibilities or chores to help out: bring in the cows, collect eggs, and go fishing.

He trapped gophers for the bounty. He’d cut off the gopher’s head, put it in a mason jar, and salt it down. He’d take it to the county sheriff, then bike into town with the bounty to spend it on pop and a movie.

Gene said a lot of people in the area survived the Great Depression by shooting deer and picking berries. It would be hard to do that now. There are stakes in the road where he used to go hunting. You can’t go there any more.

*Many people in the area  
survived the Great Depression  
by shooting deer  
and picking berries.*



LINDA POHLLOD



**Matt Welter**

*Born: May 31, 1965*

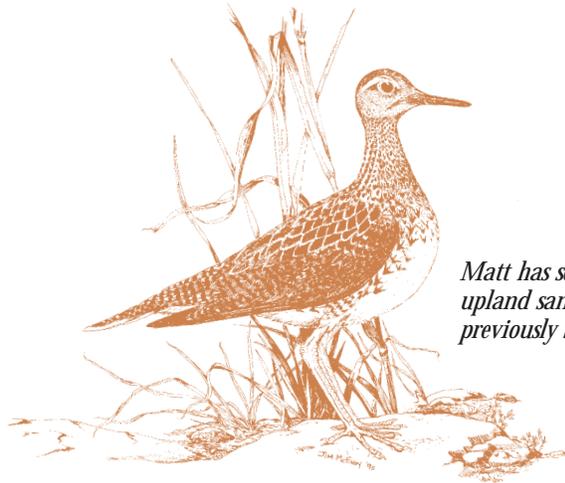
SINCE NATURALIST AND POET MATT Welter began living in the Bayfield area in 1992, he has enjoyed many activities in the barrens: participating in breeding bird surveys, looking for wild mushrooms, lying in the sand, smelling sweet fern, finding the burrowing wolf spider, and picking blueberries.

It was in the sand country that Aldo Leopold wrote about the upland sandpiper; Matt has seen a lot of upland sandpipers in a previously burned area, and his friend, Michael Van Stappen, saw a coyote there too. There was a pink light from the sunrise and the coyote took off and flushed a whole bunch of upland sandpipers.

One time recently, Matt got off the trail to see sap-suckers. It was his last opportunity to look for breeding birds that day. He was slogging through a marshy area with a lot of ostrich ferns. "You think of the barrens as being desert and dry, but there are pockets of wetness, frost pockets, small ponds." He got to a place where he couldn't move. The water was deep. It was then that he saw the white-throated sparrow carrying bugs to its nest. The bird sported an expression of "you caught me!" It was so humbling that Matt just backed away.

Matt spoke about some of the birds he's seen in the sand country. At sunset there are nighthawks, and he hears the whippoorwill. Some folks who live by the whippoorwill hate them because they're noisy all night.

Matt has gone off-trail several times to survey for nesting birds. Once on a survey, Matt encountered a brood of hermit thrush chicks running around



*Matt has seen a lot of upland sandpipers in a previously burned area.*

on the ground. He was afraid of stepping on them. Since then, he has been more hesitant to go off the trail. Another time he was in a red pine area, and a sharp-shinned hawk dive-bombed him. He couldn't find its nest, though he looked. Once he saw a ruffed grouse "coming towards him like a mad voodoo witch." Then suddenly it began acting injured. It was protecting its invisible nest.

Matt said a friend saw a sharp-tailed grouse and a short-eared owl just the night before the interview. Matt said he'd never seen a sharptail, but he and his wife, Betsy, saw two great gray owls. One was sitting on a signpost and blended in so well that Matt and Betsy sat looking at and around the sign for twenty minutes before Matt asked: "Why did they make that sign with the road sign in the middle instead of on top?" Betsy grabbed her binoculars, looked at it and said, "Oh my Gawd! It's a great gray owl!" (The owl perched atop the sign, looking to the ordinary eye like an upward extension of the sign post.) Matt has observed that mammals come in large and small. The least chipmunk is the "Lone Ranger Chipmunk," with his little black mask. They like woodpiles and old logs. They get pernickety about their log piles.



**Lowell Donald Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*

Pine Lake has been taken over by bear hunters, Matt said. Campers with barking dogs are always there. “Baroo!” Once a small bear ran 10 feet right past Matt. It was so hounded by dogs that it didn’t even notice him. Matt finds some bear hunters have an amusing family activity: dad, mom, and two kids in the car driving around, while a hound stands on the hood, barking “Baroo!” with ears flapping in the breeze.

Matt hopes that in the future there will be a few more predators in the area: wolves, maybe a mountain lion, a wolverine even. He said he’d never seen a fisher, but he thinks they’re great. He sees fewer porcupines now, since there are more fishers and fishers eat porcupines. He said we need an education effort out there though; some people don’t like fishers. Some people say fishers are eating their cats. Matt went on to say that other animals, including coyotes and owls, eat cats that people let run wild. Matt said, “When I see a cat outside, I call it ‘coyote food’.”



*Matt says chipmunks get persnickety about their log piles.*

LOWELL REMEMBERS SEEING HIS FIRST deer. It was around 1934. He heard the deer in the water. It scampered away. The next time he saw a deer, it was on his bumper. He ran into it. He also remembers when he saw his first deer tick. Three years before the interview, he had Lyme disease.

Lowell likes birds. They are abundant where the old railroad used to go. The railroad was abandoned in 1951. He’d see robins, orioles, sparrows, chickadees, crows and hawks, but not many ducks or cranes there then. You sure see them now!

One Sunday, years ago, Lowell shot a bobolink. It was a sunny day in June. He was walking down the driveway to the town road. The bobolink was sitting on a fence post, about 50 feet away. He shot it directly. He regrets it to this day. The bobolink is pretty sounding, and you know it’s summer when you hear it.

Lowell is not a hunter. He tried it, but he didn’t like it. He spent a lot of time in the sand country when he was in high school. He used to take his 22 to a Big Mound. You could see the Rush City water tower from there. It was a grassy plain with brush there then; now it’s all chewed up from motorcycles trying to negotiate the steep grade.

One spring day when he was about seventeen, Lowell and his friend followed Wood River about five miles out to the St. Croix River. They each had a hatchet and they planned to build a log hut. During Christmas vacation, they were going to live there and trap for furs. But it didn’t happen.



**Francis Lampella**

*Born: December 2, 1919*

FRANCIS HAS LIVED IN THE FINNISH settlement outside Washburn much of his life. He recounted some interesting encounters with animals, domestic and wild, in his own back yard.

One stormy day his mother went to the barn to milk the cows. He was about five years old then. He didn't want to be left with his two younger sisters, so he put his boots on and started to follow his mother. The neighbor, a fellow named Heckla, happened to see the dogs shaking something. Two dogs were attacking Francis.

Mrs. Heckla was his mother's aunt as well as their neighbor. Francis' mother had never seen bears; bears were pretty rare in Finland. One time they were by a discarded log pile when she saw something cute. It looked like puppies! His mom put the furry, wriggling, snuggling babies in her apron. Mrs. Heckla saw them and yelled at her to "Put them down!" They were bear cubs. The two women got out of there fast!

Francis' parents built his home. He moved back to the area in 1954. He wanted to live in the country. First he lived in a mobile home. He remarked that lupine grew about the house. He saw black bears close to a cabin he built on stilts



*Francis didn't see bears much when he was a boy, but he saw four bears recently.*

nearby. He didn't see bears much when he was a boy, but he saw four bears recently. In 1991, he shot a bear and gave the meat to a friend. "I don't hunt bare," he said. "I hunt with clothes on!" He doesn't hunt bear any more, he said. He doesn't eat the meat. But guys come from Madison, and they keep the population down.

He's hunted deer in the barrens. About eight or nine men would organize deer drives. But they'd scatter bullets. A stray bullet killed a friend of his. One man shot a deer in a hurry once and shot another man. They carried him out of the woods. They hunted in a timbered area. Francis said, there are too many deer now. He has a hunter's choice permit. You can kill a buck or a doe. They want to sell more licenses to kill more deer.

He remembers the first time he went hunting. He was about 15 or 16 years old. In the early years, a hunting license cost about twenty-five. It was a little tag like a campaign button on your hat. In the 1930s, there was a game warden from Ashland named L.D. Jones. The warden said he didn't mind when hungry people shot a deer, but when they tattled on each other, then he had to look into it. Francis doesn't care much for venison actually, but he makes a meatloaf with venison and some other lean meat. He says that's good.

Today Francis likes to bring salt, and the deer come. He sells apples for \$3 a bushel to hunters. It's nice extra money, and it could be 200 bushels. He picks the apples himself in September for the archery hunters. Deer come to eat the Yellow Transparency apples. They seem to prefer them to other kinds. In the winter, if the snow is deep the



*Both Francis and Harold trapped beavers in the sand country.*

deer can't get enough browse, so he feeds them ground corn. About thirty-five to forty deer come to feed there. They fight with their hooves, though, so Francis put several piles of food 10 feet apart. "Come on, Bossy," he'd call. They'd come. They knew what he was up to.

*There used to be a lottery to trap fishers. Now they're increasing. He sees the tracks.*

Years ago, Francis trapped foxes and coyotes. His brother once trapped six coyotes for \$20. In the 1940s there was a bounty. Francis trapped fisher. When he was a young man there were no fishers in the area. They're carnivorous and nimble. They can catch squirrels. The fisher is the only animal that kills porcupines well. The fisher turns the porcupine on its back. As Francis understands it, the timber people saw porcupines chewing bark on the trees so they got fishers from Minnesota. There used to be a lottery to trap fishers. Now they're increasing. He sees tracks all over now. There is a valuable fur, though the price has gone down. The female is generally worth more. To trap them, he used a square conibear to kill them quickly, not a leghold trap. Fishers are not trap-shy, he said. They're dead in a few seconds when the trap closes around their neck. He traps beaver with a conibear too. He puts brush on the trap and they come to eat it. He could get \$30 when he skins, scrapes, and stretches the pelt.



**Nora Searles**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

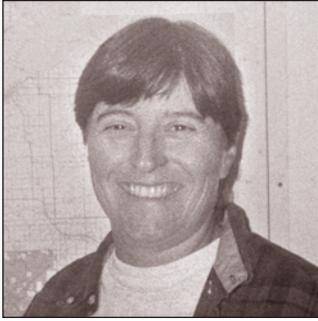
**Harold Searles**

*Born: September 13, 1911*

AS HAROLD AND I TALKED, WE WALKED along the edge of a cranberry bed. I saw tadpoles in the river that borders the bogs, a turtle, and a dead muskrat. There are also eagles, mink, geese and ducks that frequent cranberry marshes, I was told. During the Great Depression, Harold trapped beaver and muskrats to make spending money. Now he considers them both a problem for the cranberry business. Muskrats dig into the beds and fill in the ditches that need to be clear. Though they help by eating the weeds, they put holes in the dikes too. Beaver sometimes chew holes in the wooden splashboards or gates. Deer can be a problem too, when they eat the cranberries.

Harold said he went hunting every other year. There were lots of deer up in Douglas County, in the sand country. He hunted with a hunting party, then divided up the deer. He also hunted ruffed grouse and prairie chickens. Nora said her brothers and dad always used to come back with grouse and prairie chickens too. But there aren't any now; there are no corn fields either. Nora mentioned a black cocker spaniel that was great on partridge, but there aren't many partridges any more. There are wild turkeys, but no little farms for food. Now Harold hunts on his own property. The old gang has mostly died off, so they don't go up north to hunt as they used to. And they don't allow others to hunt on their property either.

A couple of years ago, Harold found a nest of little foxes. He fed them dog food and scraps until they ate out of his hand. But if foxes aren't taught to hunt when they're little, he explained, they'll never learn. He won't do that again.



**Joyce Zifco**

*Born: October 27, 1953*

A PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTER AND ignition specialist, Joyce understands that burning can benefit some wildlife. Badgers, bluebirds, thirteen-lined ground squirrels, and sharp-tailed grouse can all benefit from fires that keep the land open.

Joyce has hunted, but it didn't strike her as something she really wanted to do. She tried to shoot a deer one time and her brothers got angry because she couldn't shoot one out of a herd of four or five deer because it would be like shooting one of her horses. She was fifteen or sixteen years old then. Now she gets venison from her nephews, nieces, and brothers who hunt.

Joyce enjoys riding horseback in the barrens. The deerflies don't bother the horses as much as they do in the southern part of the National Forest around Park Falls. In the spring, when she plants trees, the plow turns up the soil, and the sand flies emerge. "They can drive you wild! They go to your face, under your hair, behind your ears. . . . Your eye could swell up. But you put cold water or ice on it. The bites don't last long." Mostly she just likes the barrens for what it is: rolling hills with unique vegetation such as hoary puccoon, blazing star, asters, bluestem grasses, all reminding her that next season change is coming.

She also appreciates the unique animal species found in the barrens. Badgers live in the sand country. Yes, she's had encounters. Once she pulled the truck over so she could go to the bathroom. She saw a critter coming down the road. She saw a stripe and thought it was a skunk, but it was a badger. It was not frightened

of her. She whistled at it and it ran off. Another time, her dog came across a badger and quickly discovered it was not something to tangle with. It was backed up ready to spring. It weighed about 50 pounds. One day, she was driving on a sand road when she saw three badgers ("a little army of badgers!") digging holes in the middle of the road, helping each other. Badger holes in the barrens are not unusual.

Once in the Moquah Wildlife Area, she heard a whistle. It was like a "wolf whistle." You can see for miles in the wildlife area. She saw it was an upland plover.

*Sand flies can drive you wild!  
"They go to your face, under  
your hair, behind your ears. . .  
Your eye could swell up."*

Joyce has spent plenty of time in the barrens. She's driven out there with a sleeping bag and slept under the stars. It's a great place to star gaze. It's pitch black so you can see "oodles" of stars. One night a deer walked close by her sleeping bag. It let out a huge snort, which scared both her and the deer.

In the Moquah area, there were tens of thousands of sharptails and prairie chickens documented in one year. But with habitat changes and hunting pressure only a few hundred birds were left when she started working there. The U.S. Forest Service



**Marjorie Martell Tutor**  
*Born: January 15, 1912*

and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) have worked to reintroduce or restore birds. Sharptails are coming back and are dancing in the barrens again. Joyce also likes seeing deer and hawks in the open country.

Joyce also spoke of a man named Ralph Wickdal, who was fond of bluebirds. When he died, he left money in his estate to support a bluebird box program. The public school system and the U.S. Forest Service together created an environmental service learning project. High school students sawed out pieces of wood, then elementary students, with the help of their parents, put the sawed pieces of bird boxes together. They put together about 500 bluebird boxes for the barrens. Joyce said some of the boxes have had to be replaced because black bears sniffed out bird eggs or babies and ripped up the box. Bears hit one whole line of boxes along the road. But generally it's been a very satisfying program for everyone. The program has been in place for all of the 20 years she has been working in the barrens.

MARGIE USED TO SEE BEAR, CHIPMUNKS, and coons while she was picking berries in the sand country. Her kids caught "pine squirrels" and fed them in a cage. One kid was bitten by a chipmunk or squirrel.

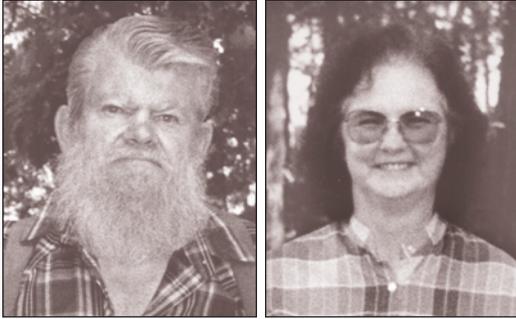
Marjorie's in-laws had hunters stay with them; later, the hunters came to her house. They hunted deer with her husband. She'd make bread, etc. while they hunted. She packed their lunches and made up Postum or coffee in thermos bottles.

*Margie's kids caught  
"pine squirrels"  
and fed them in a cage.*

*In the Moquah barrens, there used to be tens of thousands of sharptails and prairie chickens. The sharptails are coming back.*



EVUNICE PADLEY



**Milton Herman Aronson**

*Born: December 29, 1939*

**Eleanor Bistram Aronson**

*Born: November 10, 1942*

SINCE HE CAME TO THE GRANTSBURG area as a teen, Milt has done a lot of different kinds of work. In the early to mid-1980s, he harvested and sold leeches for bait. He made traps out of coffee cans and baited them with anything bloody like liver or sucker parts to catch the leeches. He mostly bought beef kidney in bulk and cut it up in small pieces. It doesn't take much for the scent to flow through the water. The coffee can will fill right to the top with solid leeches. You pick them up in the morning, because they're nocturnal. You pull the can up out of the water and drain the water out, holding your hand over the opening. The leeches like to stick to the sides of the can. Milt put them in a stock tank, like a trough for watering cows, and kept fresh, cool water running on them all the time.

Milt said catching leeches has been a secret up until now. How did he get started? When he worked cutting pulp, he got to know a guy who got bait for a shop. He started picking up a few leeches on his way to work in the early spring. By the Fourth of July, when the water gets warmer, leeches spawn, then they die. That's why you have to keep them cool, so they can't spawn. He's sold them mostly to a bait shop. You don't have to have a license to catch or sell leeches in Wisconsin, though you do in Minnesota. Milt has sold to bait businesses all over Wisconsin.

He said there's only one kind of leech to use for fishing, the ribbon leech, so you have to hope you get the right kind. The ribbon leech can get four or five inches long. It's not very colorful, but if you pester it, it curls up in a ball, like a

small cobra. It has a thin piece of skin on each side, like a ribbon there. Leeches are one of the cleanest things there is, Milt insists. They need really good water. When you go to catch leeches, he says, you should use as small and light a boat as you can to get into the hard-to-reach places and carry as many cans as you can.

Once he did a foolish thing and reached too far trying to pick up one of his cans. He swamped the boat. He got all wet and the cans were floating all over. He made a lot of work for himself that day. He had to round up all the cans again. He lost an hour because he was in a hurry to begin with. But mostly he likes trapping leeches. "It's fun. You're out in the quiet."

For years, Milt has wondered where the crickets and other creatures have gone. He says there aren't very many crickets any more. Nor are there



*Remembering his own youth, Milt hopes kids will leave badgers alone.*

DEAN TVEDT

*Milt said catching leeches has been a secret up until now.*

as many badgers and skunks as there used to be, from Milt's perspective. He and his wife, Eleanor, like to drive around looking for wildlife. Three days before the interview, they saw a badger on Crex Meadows. It was the first badger they'd seen in years.

When he was young, Milt saw a badger in a ditch. He was driving a pickup home from cutting wood. He stopped the truck and grabbed the badger. He had to outrun the badger first. It was trying to get away, but he caught it in a couple of fast steps. He grabbed it by the skin on its back and held on. It couldn't reach him with its claws or teeth.

Just three days before I interviewed him, Milt said he saw some kids stop to see a badger. His thoughts were: "I hope they leave that badger alone!" He said he was thinking of himself and how "macho" he had been.

Also three days before the interview, Milt said he saw about 400–500 sandhill cranes in the fields. He said they were back to their bluish gray color. The rusty color was gone. That's the mud they put on themselves while they're here; it's good camouflage. In September, the cranes are "packing their bags" to fly south.

Although Milt doesn't like the sand flies and buffalo gnats there, one thing he likes about the sand country is that you can see how many deer crossed your yard in the morning and whether they were big or small. You can tell by their tracks in the sand. He's had bears in the yard too—three to five at a time.



USED WITH PERMISSION BY DALE BOHLKE

*Sandhill cranes weren't plentiful when Eleanor was a girl, although they are now.*

Eleanor said one night she came home to find bears in the yard. She had to run towards them with the car so they'd go up a tree so she could go in the house. Her grandmother used to throw water on them when they were on her step. Now the neighbors are feeding bears for hunting season. She wonders what will become of the other bears after they shoot the one they want.

Eleanor commented that the Wisconsin DNR is trying to bring a lot of wildlife back. There are swans and geese now. They're doing burning for prairie chickens, she said. She doesn't remember seeing them until the last couple of years. As a girl, it was partridges she saw, not prairie chickens. Sandhill cranes weren't plentiful when she was a girl, although they are now. Milt likes nature too. He enjoys the flying squirrels. He used to hunt deer. But he almost got shot one time—a shot took twigs off by his ear. Come hunting season, there are people all over. He quit hunting then until his boy was old enough to learn, then he took him. Milt doesn't hunt any more. Eleanor never did.

**Ardell Lowell Anderson**

*Born: January 22, 1935*

**Floyd Lang**

*Born: April 6, 1914*

**Mariam Esther Lebeck Lang**

*Born: July 23, 1921*

**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

**Raymond (Bob) Johnson**

*Born: February 12, 1913*

THROUGH THE GRANTSBURG Historical Society, I facilitated a small group discussion in September 1999. When I asked how the participants got spending money when they were young, they launched into a discussion of wildlife and pets.

Ardell Anderson said his dad trapped skunks. Skunks were the only small animal they got money for in the 30s. There were a lot of skunks then, and they got \$3–4 a hide, which were made into ladies' fur coats. Nowadays, three or four hides are only worth \$1.00.

One time Ardell hit a skunk with his brother's '48 Chevy. He had borrowed the car to pick up his girlfriend. On the way home, they were eating ice cream bars when they hit the skunk. They had to throw the ice cream away because the smell of skunk was so strong it almost made them sick. Needless to say, his brother was a bit peeved when his car, which he planned on taking on a big date that night, smelled so horrid. He had to take their dad's car. On the way to his date, he had to go

over some very rough, freshly graded gravel road. Not realizing a rock had made a hole in the oil pan, he enjoyed an evening of roller-skating with his date. During that time the oil drained from the car, and he didn't notice as he drove his date home. Their dad had to buy a new engine. To this day, Ardell has been blamed for the burned-out engine because he hit the skunk to begin with.

Floyd Lang said he'd live-trapped a skunk just the other day and threw him out. He used to smoke them out. He got sprayed in the face once when he was a kid. He got scared and started home. He wiped the spray off and nobody noticed, except that he smelled of skunk. He went on to say that maybe that's still what's wrong with his eyes—he just had a cornea transplant.

Don Shogren said he did bounty hunting: he shot crows and trapped gophers. He said that he and his uncle chased skunks. They were beautiful in winter. You didn't have to stretch their hides; you just threw them in a box and froze them. Don took a bath in the barn and kept clothes out there to change into, in case of offensive odor. He got 500 skunks in one winter, worth \$3,000–4,000 in the 1930s! He used to dig skunks out.

Eric Lee, Don's uncle, fell off a boxcar he was riding from harvesting in the Dakotas. The train went over him, and he lost his arm. But he could still dig a skunk out. He'd reach in the den and grab the skunk by the tail and legs. He kept the tail down and hit the skunk on the head with the cut-off stump of his arm to kill it. Don tried one time, but he couldn't hold the tail down so he got sprayed.



DEAN TWEET

*During a group discussion, everybody shared skunk stories.*



*Skunk tracks in the snow.  
Don thought skunks were  
beautiful in winter.*

DNR ARCHIVE

*Ardell had a tame raccoon,  
but some raccoons were  
troublesome.*



HERB LANGE

Don's friend, Art Wagenius, had a tame skunk. It was just like a kitten. He never had it de-scented. It was tame as could be. He raised mink too.

Mariam Lang said her son is a veterinarian. He won't de-scent skunks any more. He talks people out of it. They are wild animals after all.

Raymond (Bob) Johnson remembered when he was about six years old, and his brother told him to check the traps. There was a skunk in a trap. He looked at it. Up close. He can still see that stream of yellow coming at his face. He was sick in bed two days after that, and it burned his eyes. He never trapped again. Being sprayed by a skunk could cure anybody of that, he said.

When Ardell's children were young, they caught a very small baby raccoon. Ardell built a cage for it immediately. But the raccoon wouldn't stay in the cage. It would squeeze through the smallest opening. The raccoon was already tame and it never left the place during that summer or the following winter. Whenever Ardell went for a walk, the dog, cat, and raccoon came trailing after him. One time the coon followed Lois, his wife when she was hunting. She thought it was a deer coming, but it was just the coon. The raccoon hibernated in the hay bales, then disappeared in the spring. Ardell never saw the raccoon again. A mechanic told him that he'd seen a raccoon by the road by their house. He'd opened the car door and the coon had gotten in. He drove it away and let it out in the Crex Meadow Wildlife Area a few miles away. It was probably the same raccoon.

Another friend of Ardell's, Joe Lener, raised chickens in a corncrib. The chickens were losing legs. A coon was coming up under the chickens, pulling the legs through the slats, and eating the legs off. Raccoons can be mean sometimes too.

Floyd Lang remembered a pet crow he'd had one summer. It would sit on the windowsill, and he'd feed it. They raised border collies too. One time he broke a piece of bread in two, with one big piece and one small. Queenie, the dog, came. The crow looked at the dog, dropped the small piece, grabbed the big piece, and flew up to a tree. The crow rested in the cedars. The colder it got, the higher up in the cedars she went. Then she disappeared. He found her dead in a field. An owl got her.

Ardell went on to say that when you hunt crows, you can put a stuffed owl in the tree. Crows get so excited, they don't hear the shooting for a while. But they learn fast. They won't come a second time.

Don Shogren said one time he'd seen big wing tracks in the snow and signs of a battle. There was blood around. He figured it must have been a stalemate. The owl must have tackled the fox.

Ardell knew some folks who raised turkeys. One time a turkey was missing, so they followed the tracks. A fox had grabbed that turkey by the wing and led it down into the woods and killed it there. The fox was smart. He knew he couldn't carry it.



**Clarence Arthur  
Wistrom**

*Born: January 18, 1909*

CLARENCE RECALLED THAT WHEN A dam was constructed on the Clam River, near Webster, around 1935, the depth of the lake was increased, altering the marshland that used to be there, and decreasing duck populations. As a boy, Clarence hunted ducks on the flowage, so he has really observed the changes. The lake is on the migration route for ducks flying south from Canada, and there's wild rice there, so the lake would be covered with ducks in the fall. Clarence liked to come to Clam Lake and other lakes in Burnett and Washburn counties for duck hunting. He'd put up decoys and build a blind out of rushes

*The decoys attracted the  
ducks, and it was  
"outstanding shooting."*

along the shore. The decoys attracted the ducks, and it was "outstanding shooting."

The influx of summer cottages that have been built along the shoreline, the resultant motor boat traffic, and the increased openness of the water resulting from the dam all affect the habitat and interfere with the ducks.

In 1937, Clarence took and passed the Conservation Warden test. That fall he worked as a conservation warden in Burnett County. One time he and another warden went out to a small lake. Two men in a boat said the hunting was "Outstanding! We got our limit!" They had twenty ducks in the boat, but only one of the men had a license. The limit on ducks was ten at that time. So the wardens made an "outstanding arrest!" They arrested the guy with the license. He accepted it well, though the fine was probably about \$50, which was a lot in those days.

When Clarence was a boy, hunting was the thing to do. Although he introduced both his sons to hunting, neither one is interested in the activity today. Clarence himself went deer hunting every other year until about four years prior to the interview. He remembered one time they drove deer out of a wooded area into the open. A large buck came out, and he killed it. It was a 17-point buck. There are a large number of beautiful bucks in the sand country, he says. It's good hunting.



ROBERT QUJEN

*Clam Lake is on the migration route and there's wild rice there, so the lake was covered with ducks in the fall. Hunters set up decoys to attract them further.*

# People



COURTESY OF GRANTSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Lolita's grandfather was a surveyor,  
a timber cruiser, and a "locator".  
He helped people find their homesteads.  
He also ran a post office. There were no  
roads or bridges then, so he laid them out.*

*When Dorothy first came to the barrens,  
there were only two other people who  
lived near her year round.  
Now she considers the area congested.  
People love the area and plan to  
retire there. Her family keeps trying to  
get her to move back to Illinois,  
but she says "No way!"*

People

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FCIT

# People



*Many people have had an impact on the land, but now people come for the beauty of the landscape, wildlife viewing, and recreational opportunities.*

**E**cosystem management includes the human dimension or the interests of people in the area as well as the ecological needs. It would be incomplete to tell only the pieces of the interviews that pertained directly to the ecology or natural resources of the area. In this section, you can read some of the stories about people's lives that may or may not fit with the other themes that emerged from the interviews: stories about people, their occupations, their families, their fun, hard times, hopes, and sorrows. Some of these events might have happened anywhere, or to anyone, but they happened to people connected to the Northwest Sands Area, and thus they are part of the sculpting tools that shaped the human landscape. Some of the people mentioned were people who were seen as heroes or villains, people who had some impact on the sand country. Some of the details in this section may be included because they give a glimpse into a specific time. Have you ever wondered what it was like during World War II, how the flu of 1918 touched people in rural Wisconsin, or how people coped with the Great Depression? Some of these accounts are personal brushstrokes on a broad canvas that is now recognized as an historical backdrop. Just as these memories are part of history now, so our lives are part of history in the making, even as we live them day by day.



**James Orvin Evrard**  
*Born: July 19, 1942*

OUT OF HIS PERSONAL INTEREST, JIM has studied some of the history of the Northwest Sands Area. He shared some of what he's learned, though such sharings go beyond the reach of oral history. Jim is an active member of the Burnett County Historical Society.

Jim doesn't like the development that comes with proximity to the Twin Cities. Land values are spiraling up. People are buying up small parcels for recreation. The counties recognize some of the threats to lakefronts from all the development, but recognition of the threat to the wild open country overall is slower to come. Jim really likes the openness of the vegetation in the area and the wildness of this part of the state. More people are living in rural areas and commuting into towns like Grantsburg to work. He'd rather see the quality of life grow than the quantity of people.

When Jim thinks of people who have influenced the land, he thinks of Norm Stone, the first manager at Crex Meadows and one of the first people in Wisconsin to use fire to manage habitat for wildlife. Norm liked to boast that he was a self-made man. He didn't have much academic training, but he was well read. He used a bulldog approach to get the job done, and didn't ask permission before he acted, so some people resented his methods, but he was definitely dedicated. Norm had friends in high places to protect him politically, but he lost a "battle" in the Amsterdam Sloughs and alienated DNR staff when he optioned too much land, and the DNR let some land purchase options expire. This might have contributed to the political pressure that forced a turnover of the DNR Secretary. Pat

Lucey was governor then, and he wanted his own person as Secretary of the DNR.

After that, Norm retired and washed his hands of land management issues; though he kept his DNR uniform and volunteered to lead Audubon tours, etc. Norm was rumored to have had a big ego. His CB handle was Gray Eagle. He always drove a Buick. In his eyes, it was the only car. It was said that he once purposely ruined a transmission on a state car so he could drive his own Buick. Norm's legend may have grown taller since his death, but in Jim's opinion, he was the right man at the right time. Norm acquired 40,000 acres for the DNR; many people appreciate the fact that the DNR owns the land, which would otherwise be in private ownership.

As an active member in the Burnett County Historical Society, Jim shared some information about occupations in the area and historically what has drawn people to the Northwest Sands Area.

*Norm Stone was the first manager at Crex Meadows and one of the first people in Wisconsin to use fire to manage habitat for wildlife.*



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

# People

Top: Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center.

Center: Kreinersville, once a thriving village north of Crex, was abandoned due to a decline in the logging, blueberry, and cranberry industries.

Bottom: West Marshland Town Hall.

Around 1845, there were logging camps by the Clam River. In 1865, the Hickerson Roller Mill made flour. In 1884, the railroad ran through the Grantsburg area, until the 1950s. Around 1890, the Grantsburg Starch Factory made starch from locally grown potatoes. School was actually dismissed two weeks each fall so the kids could help harvest the potatoes. Around the same period there was also the Terra Cotta Brick Factory. The creamery was active around 1897. There was a paint mine factory that made rust red paint around 1914. In the late 1920s and early 30s, the golf course and ski slide were opened. Around 1946 or '47, the state began buying land. In the 1960s, Parker Hannifen made metal couplings. In the early 1970s when Jim moved to the area, manufacturing was the big occupation. Workers were attracted here to make metal machine parts because, in part, of the surroundings, the “outdoor amenities,” and the way of life. Agriculture declined, but tourism increased. People come for snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, boating, fishing, hunting, mountain biking, ATV riding, birding, and wildlife watching.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

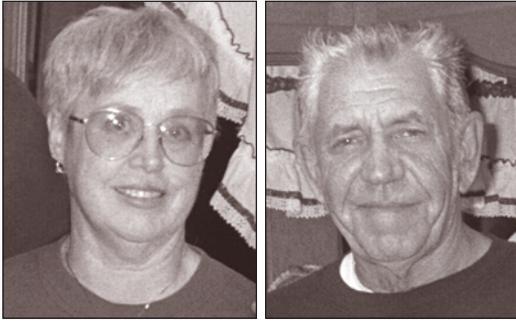


COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

1830's	1842	1851	1865	1871	1877	1896	1899
The LaPointe Trail is constructed through Crex Meadows. The trail is a mail route between Madeline Island and Fort Anthony and used as a tote road for settlers.	First Territorial Road authorized from St. Croix Falls to Clam Lake.	First hunting law enacted (closed season for deer from February 1 to July 1).	Burnett County is created. Last known elk killed in Wisconsin.	Widespread fires in the area due to drought. Commercial harvest of cranberries begins.	Marshland Hotel (later known as Smith's Stopping Place) built in Crex Meadows along Bayfield Road.	A record 4,277 crates of blueberries are shipped from Grantsburg. First year that licenses are required for deer hunting.	Last report of passenger pigeons in Wisconsin.



**Sena Borup Christopherson**

*Born: November 26, 1941*

**Eugene Larry (Buddy) Christopherson**

*Born: July 11, 1934*

BUDDY AND HIS WIFE, SENA, HAVE known each other since Buddy frequented a restaurant Sena's folks ran in Falun. Buddy's folks lived in Phantom Lake, which became all water in 1948 when the Conservation Department bought the land and diked it. Buddy's family moved a lot but ended up in Falun around 1943. Buddy's parents farmed. His mom worked at the Antlers Hotel for a while. Buddy worked at various jobs, from working on the dikes at Crex Meadows, running the Falun milk route for the creamery in Falun, to digging gravel out of Johnson's gravel pit in Lincoln Township. The gravel pit was privately owned before, but was sold in recent years, and now it belongs to a big company. Buddy also had beef cattle for a while. Sena worked for the telephone office.

Falun used to be bigger than it is now, with three grocery stores, three gas stations, and an implement dealer. Local farmers came to the restaurant that Sena's parents ran. It cost seventy-five cents for Sunday noon dinner, or \$1.25 with dessert. Buddy said he used to sit right on Highway 70 and watch a movie on the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) Hall. They'd spread a sheet on the building to serve as a movie screen. People sat on the road or on the stoop of the hardware store. They watched movies from the "Zorro" series or whatever. By the time Sena moved to Falun in 1950, there were no movies shown there. You couldn't sit on Highway 70 to watch a movie now—that's a highway from Minneapolis-St. Paul, and it sees plenty of traffic.

Bud and Sena enjoy "jeeping." The trails they used years ago are blocked off now and used for snowmobiles. They have a snowmobile, but they liked making their own trails at 15 to 20 miles an hour. Now snowmobilers go way too fast on a narrow trail. "It's very dangerous."

Some who had a significant impact on the land were the Crex Carpet Company, Peet and Kohler, and Norm Stone. The carpet company had the land ditched. Peet and Kohler were two land speculators who bought land along the St. Croix River and ditched it for trout ponds. That area was purchased by the Wisconsin DNR and is now called the Kohler Peet Barrens. Northern Wisconsin DNR game manager Norm Stone initiated the Crex Meadows project. Norm was a tall fellow, dark-haired, and highly energetic; his general pace was full speed ahead!



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**

*Born: December 8, 1928*

**Donald Lee Shogren**

*Born: November 13, 1919*

LOIS AND HER HUSBAND, DON, LIVE in Grantsburg on the same site Lois' great, great grandfather homesteaded in 1862. Lois recalls a good childhood. "We did our own recreation," she said. They played "kitten ball" or softball in warm weather and skied in winter. Don, who was raised by Fish Lake, said that in winter they didn't plow the roads until 1937. He remembered one time in school in the winter the kids all went out skiing on Fish Lake Road. It was a beautiful day and they had so much fun they forgot the time. It was 3:00 when they got back to school.

Don went to school at Fish Lake. They paid the janitor there about \$5 a year. His sister was janitor one year. One of his schoolmates, Harold Powell, walked three miles through the St. Croix Swamp to get to school. He hooked a log behind a horse to plow a path to walk on. Jacqueline Norris walked across the St. Croix River in winter and took a boat across in warm weather. She walked four and a half miles to come to Fish Lake School. She was Indian but went to the White school instead of the Indian one. She grew into the most beautiful woman, slender, with olive skin and a beautiful voice. Later she sang hymns at funerals. She married a lawyer and ended up with money. But when she was a schoolgirl, she stayed at Don's family's place when the river was not fit to cross. At lunchtime, the kids at school traded sandwiches a lot. There was one kid who wouldn't trade sandwiches with Don because there was an Indian staying at his house.

*Don talked about the Norris family and took me to a small cemetery almost lost in the woods.*

Don graduated from eighth grade in about 1934. Those were tough times, and he wasn't able to get to go to high school. He remembers that the Indian students in the area went to a boarding school in South Dakota. They were provided with free transportation on the railroad to get there. Around 1930 this transportation law was rescinded, and the Indians had to go to local schools like everyone else. Don wanted an education too, but living far from high school, that was not to be. Don felt he had grown up without prejudice, but he thinks the prejudice against Indians was worse than that against Blacks in the Northwest Sands Area.

The Norris family lived in Minnesota, but they came across the river to the store, to visit Don's parents, and to be buried in a small cemetery now almost lost in the woods. Charlie Norris, Sr. (1865–1938), could swim the river with a 50 pound sack of flour on his neck and never get the sack wet. Charlie, Jr., worked for Don's parents. He didn't like cows so he worked in the house with Christine Shogren, Don's mom. He hid from her when he'd been drinking. Charlie would head for the house asking, "Is Christine up?" Don's sister



SUSAN GILCHRIST

**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**  
**Donald Lee Shogren** *(continued)*

never married, and when Charlie was drinking, he'd say "We should have gotten married." Don's father, Art, died in 1965; he was born Art Benson in 1887, but adopted his stepfather's name, Shogren. He died on the day of the auction. Art was found leaning back in his chair, dead. Don sold everything. His brother didn't help with the auction; he was in too much shock. That was one of the toughest days of Don's life. That day Charlie Norris wouldn't shake hands with Don. "You sold Art's tractor, you [expletive]!" was what he said. That was the last time he spoke to Don.

Don remembered a man named Joe Cook too. He was a big Indian man, with bad eyes, which prevented him from going to college, though his brothers and sisters did. Joe worked at the Crex Camp. He'd walk four miles across the meadow to visit Art and Christine, Don's parents. All four kids would run to greet him, and he'd carry all of them across the meadow and back to the barn at once. Joe could start spark plugs with his hands and stop a moving tractor. He was really a strong guy!

When Don was seventeen, he went to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and served from 1937–39. He was in the Danbury Camp, Camp 26. He planted trees, made timber improvements, fixed roads, and worked on a survey crew. Now they use aerial photos and high tech. Then, to determine acreage, he used a matchbook as a tally counter, bending over one match per unit of feet or paces. Mostly they paced the distance to measure it. "If you are careful, pacing can come out awfully close to measurement." You would never destroy a surveyor's witness tree in those days, but lots of them have been destroyed now.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*During the Great Depression, the government ran Civilian Conservation Corps camps in the sand country.*

*It took 20 years for electricity to move from one neighborhood to another.*

Following his work in the CCC, Don worked for the DNR at the fire tower in 1940–41, then went into the service. From 1946–48, he worked at the Grantsburg Forest Station.

When Don talked about the deerflies, Jim Evrard said 6-12 was a World War II invention. Don said he always had to carry DDT powder with GI portable showers when he was in the service in 1942–45. In the army, you powdered yourself with DDT to get rid of the lice. Lice were a fact of life. Don participated in basic training in Texas, then went to Africa and Italy. He was an anti-aircraft operator first; then he went to the infantry. He said it was "intense, horrible; you're not a human being any more."

Don got to North Africa just as the war ended. He came down with yellow jaundice, infectious hepatitis, and malaria too.

When he was sent to the hospital in North Africa, he weighed only 118 pounds. He had to eat a diet with no fat and no candy. The Italian Campaign ended in April. As an artillery mechanic, he had a pretty good life. He met the French in northern



*Putting up telephone poles was part of a federal program. Here men prepare the poles.*



*Climbing the poles was frightening to some of the workers.*

PHOTOS: DNR ARCHIVE

Italy, then had to herd prisoners from the German First Alpine Division, an elite group who had never fired a shot in the war and wanted free passage back to Germany. Don said they had to return the German guns so the Germans could protect themselves from the Italians. Don could speak Italian, and the Germans could too. Don said he had CIA clearance because he had access to code devices they didn't want to slip into enemy hands—all this just for his rank of sergeant!

There was still shoe rationing in 1945, after the war. There had been sugar and gasoline rationing during the war. Berdella Johnson, who was present during this discussion, said there were newspaper drives, and people collected scrap metal, tin cans, and bacon grease to make ammunition for the war effort. She collected milkweed pods to make life jackets for the sailors. But if you punctured a waterproof packet and the milkweed pods got wet, the life jacket wouldn't work. Don was glad he never had to use a life preserver, though he did have to wear one. He was on a ship when the army surrounded oil tankers to protect them off Gibraltar. A torpedo went past his ship.

Don returned to the U.S. in November 1945. He came past the Statue of Liberty. He took a train home from Illinois. He found he had forgotten a lot of people in his four-year absence. It was like starting all over. He was not married yet

at that time. The land didn't seem different when Don came back from the war, except that maybe he saw more deer.

In 1954 they got electricity. Other places got electricity much sooner than the barrens. It took twenty years for electricity to move from one neighborhood to another in some cases. REA, the Royal Electrical Administration, was the federal program. The Polk-Burnett Electrical Coop was a cooperative. REA lent them money to get started. In the barrens, people were scattered so it was too expensive for a small private company to serve. In the beginning, Don's family had their own generator, a 32-volt light plant. Don did a lot of electrical work, repairing plants. Folks got milk machines after they got electricity. Most farmers milked by hand before then. All the farmers had to clear the right of way for the line. They did this in winter when there was not much snow. There was a terrible telephone system with one wire until they put in a dial system and whole electrical system around 1959 or 1960. Then everybody got the same telephone company. They stopped having party lines then. Don did repair work on telephone lines.

Don was a fire control assistant/conservation aid when he worked at the ranger station. He was one of the very first conservation aids. He climbed jack pine poles with a spur strapped to his legs and a belt around the pole. He often climbed right up

**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**  
**Donald Lee Shogren** *(continued)*

with his hands. He started with poles 12 feet high and ended up with 36-foot poles. Some men would climb up, put their hands on top of the pole to signify done, then look down and freeze. He'd get a rope on them with block and tackle on top of the pole to get them down. This reminded Don of "Section 8" battle fatigue. He saw people go "off the edge" when he was in the war.

Don lived next to the railroad track and warehouse so everything to be shipped went past his yard. His dad ran the warehouse for years. The wiregrass from the carpet company that began around 1911 would come in huge bales of 200–300 pounds that were all handled by hand. They used grain binders for cutting the grass. People tied it in bundles, dried it, and hauled it to the stacking islands. Wiregrass is sharp, especially when it's green, and people had bleeding hands from handling the wiregrass. The barbs on the grass point down, so you would cut yourself if you ran your hands upwards. They would run it through a machine to take the branches and leaves off it, so it had a solid stem. They hauled it on sleighs in the winter. They stacked it on islands in 20 feet by 40 feet stacks, then baled it with a cotton press. The islands were cleared places, except for a Norway pine here and there and some brush along the shore. The cotton baler was a machine from the south. The warehouse was 100 feet by 300 feet, long enough for three railroad cars. About 120–123 bales fit in a boxcar.

Camp 6 of the Crex Carpet Company was located in what's now the Fish Lake Wildlife Area. The camp included about 40 employees and about as many horses. Some married couples worked there.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*Though the Crex Carpet Company was located in the vicinity, no one around Grantsburg had Crex carpets then. They were too expensive.*

The women picked up the stuff to dry and worked outside. They took lunch out to the men. In the later years, they had cars. Some people stayed home and drove to work at the camp six days a week, rather than live on site. Harvest time was in July and August. They had a system of dikes and ditches to control the water table, as they wanted the marsh wet in the spring, but not in late summer. Now only the concrete foundation remains. There were bunkhouses once and probably a root cellar. Camps 5 and 7 were north of Crex Meadows. In the 1934 fire, the big wiregrass warehouse in Grantsburg came down. The advent of linoleum and cheaper Japanese-made carpet signaled the demise of the Crex Carpet Company. Crex carpet was on the Titanic when the oceanliner sank, Don said, but no one around Grantsburg had Crex carpets then; they were too expensive. Lois explained that people they knew had braided rugs, loomed cotton rugs, or crochet hooked rugs. A neighbor named Augusta Ormstone had a loom.

In 1884 the railroad shipped a lot of potatoes to Grantsburg. (There was a potato starch factory there around 1890.) A lot of pulpwood was shipped by rail over the years. The railroad closed down in 1954 because there was not enough shipping use. Lois remembered how it used to be a big event to watch the men turn the



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS

*The wire grass was harvested and made into carpets. Don showed me one of the Crex Carpets.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Wiregrass was shipped by rail to the carpet factory in St. Paul where it was made into carpets.*

engine around on a big turntable. They would push it by hand. Don remembers watching it too. They would get it balanced and lined up with the tracks. People would gather to watch, near where the post office is in Grantsburg now. When Don was a kid, there were two trains a day. It cost eight cents to go from Lindspur to Grantsburg, about five miles. Places were named after the railroad spur where they pushed off the cars and whoever lived there.

Clayfield is named after the old clay pit. Don's dad worked there around 1918–1920. The bricks to build Stillwater prison came from there. They dug through the sand to get the clay. Don's dad ran an engine. Donkey cars hauled the clay from the pit. They dumped the clay into the railroad gondolas and shipped it to be made into bricks. It was really red clay. Lois had a niece in art school in Kansas City who made some things from that red clay.

Don and Lois met each other because their families knew each other. They didn't go to the same school, but Lois played on a girls' softball team with Don's sister-in-law. Every town had a baseball team.

Don said the early 1970s saw a big influx of recreation in the sand country. There was a land boom. People built housing, and when electricity reached

out there, that helped. A lot of people still buy land out there just to own their own piece. Recreation land is more expensive than farmland. The trend seems to be to buy land for a summer home, then move here permanently. People come for the hiking, snowmobiling, fishing, and hunting. In the 1970s, cross-country dirt bikes and motorcycle racing were popular all through the public lands. Those activities tore up the landscape and made terrible ruts. "It's a big gully," Don said. The county prohibited cross-country motor cycling because sparks from the motors caused fires. Erosion was another problem. With the topsoil and vegetation torn off, water washed out the sand so much that trees actually slid down the steep hill. The land is healing some now. ATV people want their piece of the pie, so they now have an authorized trail. Jim Evrard, another interviewee who was present during this part of the discussion, explained that a \$100,000 bridge over a swamp in the town of Blaine, north of the St. Croix River was paid for with ATV permit sales, because the county and the DNR said ATVs couldn't run through the swamp. Some people who have snowmobiles bring in ATVs—you can watch the trailers come past your house.

Don and Lois used to snowmobile, but don't anymore. Don remembers one time cutting the engines in the beautiful sunlight, in the white,

*Duck hunting has been and still is a popular activity in the barrens, though the regulations may change from year to year.*

**Lois Elaine Lundberg Shogren**  
**Donald Lee Shogren** *(continued)*

pristine snow, in a stand of eighty- to one-hundred-year-old red and white pines. He thought it was like heaven. Don used to ice fish too. But now he and Lois go south for the winter, to the Alabama shore.

There is a little Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran church called Pleasant Prairie nearby. Don's folks are buried in the cemetery there, and Don is on the Board. Lois' ancestors went to that church too at one time. But the Norwegians in the church asked them to leave because they were Swedes, which were considered "quarrelsome," so they went to the farther church. Lois' great-grandfather is buried in Wilson Cemetery, though they lived closer to Pleasant Prairie.

Another piece of history is the tote road that cut through the Grantsburg area. It was the first road from Ashland, Wisconsin to St. Paul, Minnesota. It crossed the Wood River, then the St. Croix, at a town called Sunrise. In the 1840s there was an army fort on the Sunrise side of the river. The land was considered "Indian Territory" by the people of European descent then, and the soldiers escorted groups along the road. The road went right across the open barrens; it was level with fewer hills, and there was less mud there in the spring; it was easier going. The road went right by where Don lived on Fish Lake.

When he was growing up, Don said there was not a house going west along Fish Lake Road. People moved out of the country years ago. But now they're moving back to the country.

Don remembered "barnstorming." Pilots would take people up in a plane for a ride for money. A



COURTESY OF CREX MEADOWS



DNR ARCHIVE

*People come for recreation now, for hiking, snowmobiling, fishing, and hunting.*

pilot took Don up once. He flew under a telephone wire to give Don a scary ride, then right around a silo. The pilot was a fighter pilot in World War II. He didn't make it back from the Pacific.

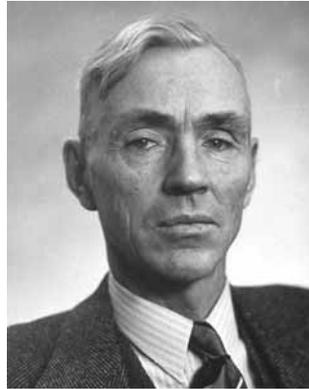
Barney Divine was a conservation hero of Don's and a friend of his dad's. He ate Sunday dinner with Don's family. He was one game warden who was respected for the way he stopped illegal hunting. He didn't make arrests just to make arrests. If you were going to eat a deer you shot, he'd let you eat it, but he wouldn't let you sell it if you shot it illegally. He got to be head game warden in the state of Wisconsin, and the first patrol boat on the Great Lakes was named for him.

Another conservation hero in Don's eyes, Ernie Swift, also was a state game warden. Both he and Barney Divine were from the sand country. Don appreciated Ernie for curtailing illegal duck hunting. He quit the Conservation Department and worked as a federal warden. It was Ernie



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Another piece of history is the old tote road that cut through the Grantsburg area.*



DNR ARCHIVE



DNR ARCHIVE

*Barney Divine (left) was a game warden who was well respected and became the head game warden in Wisconsin. Ernie Swift (right) was a game warden who curtailed illegal duck hunting and arrested Al Capone.*

who arrested Al Capone, the gangster leader, for shooting fish below the Chippewa dam. (Capone had a hideout near Couderay and Hayward, near where Lois used to fish.)

Charlie Saunders served as county sheriff for several years. His wife served as sheriff when his term expired, until he could run for sheriff again. He was a shaky guy in his later years. He smoked cigarettes. He could hardly hold a cup of coffee then. But in his early years, he could ride down the road and shoot every fence post with a pistol.

Big Gust (Anders Gustaf Anderson, born in Sweden in 1892) was a local hero in Grantsburg, largely because of his size it seems (7' 6" tall and 360 pounds). Since he died of cancer in 1926, Don barely remembers him, but everybody around knew him. He was the marshal in the Village of Grantsburg, where he lived for twenty-five years.

Charlie O'Neill was a police marshal in St. Croix. It was rumored that he always had a five-gallon jug of moonshine in the back seat when he went duck hunting. One night in about 1931 or '32, the phone rang around 3:00 in the morning. It was Tony's wife. She said Tony and Charlie Saunders had gone to help Charlie O'Neill put up duck blinds that afternoon, but Tony hadn't come home yet. Don's dad went down to the duck blind site and found the three men, totally drunk. They had tipped over the boat and were drying their clothes

by the fire. This was during prohibition, and these guys were supposed to be enforcement officials. Don's dad called their wives and let them sleep it off. They went home around 8:00.

There were a lot of bootleggers around, Don said. They hid their stills in the cornfields and woods. They built their stills in abandoned barns to hide them from airplane surveys. Many barns burned up because of stills in them. They had to have heat to operate the still. You could hear the burners a mile away. They cooked at night and practiced shooting in the daytime. Moonshiners would jump in their cars and run when their stills started fires. The fire from the still would set the countryside ablaze, and the local people would have to put the fire out. Charlie Saunders didn't bother the moonshiners. The federal people had to come get them.

Lois said she heard her share of moonshine stories too. Her dad used to go solder the stills for the moonshiners. He wasn't too proud of this later, but at the time it seemed reasonable. In the end, prohibition didn't prove anything. It didn't work. It was really another era.

Eunice Kanne was Lois' schoolteacher. When she was close to ninety, she traveled all over the world. She went across the North Sea in a rowboat. She's been to the Amazon in South America. She lives in Grantsburg now and writes books about the area.



**Raymond Bergerson**  
Born: March 4, 1913



RAY LIVED IN THE WIREGRASS CAMP until 1918; his dad was in that business until 1932. Life in the wiregrass camps was hard, and so were some of the men who worked there. People who worked in the logging camps in winter moved here in May to harvest the grass, then moved on to harvest fields of grain in the Dakotas in August.

The guys in the wiregrass camp picked lice off themselves and put the lice in ketchup bottles. They would hold a finger over the opening so the lice couldn't get out. A lot of those guys were hard on the bottle. They were single men, "floaters." They were paid with a "brass," which was a round washer with a number on it. They would hand over the brass and be paid by the number on it. People were honest in those days; you could loan money and still get paid back. Most of the men had nicknames like Spike, One-tooth, or Baldy. To prevent fights, everyone was expected to speak English; you were not allowed to speak your mother language. The men came from Yugoslavia and Germany just before World War I. A few were Scandinavian; many were Irish. A lot of Irish people came as indentured servants. They had to work off their fare from Ireland. There were some individual family units in the wiregrass camp, small cabins, but mostly it was army-style bunkhouses, with a kitchen alongside. Women came in during World War II, but then the camp closed about a year later. The men mostly ate salt pork. There was no electricity, just kerosene lamps and a big icehouse for refrigeration. They bought dried fruit by the barrel and fed heavy on pastry. They ate five meals a day! Sometimes the men in the wiregrass camp gave Ray pennies, etc. He kept them in a Postum can

with a slot in the top. He saved up that and the money he made trapping gophers for ten cents a gopher and bought a baseball glove. He played baseball on a school baseball team. He was never allowed to buy candy with his money, but that didn't matter because his grandma gave him candy.

The workers cut the wiregrass with a reaper, a machine with a big arm that went around. People called "flappers," or "rubber backs," turned the cut wiregrass over so it dried underneath. A farmer invented a converted grain binder for the job, but he got nothing out of his invention. It picked up grass and tied it in bundles with twine. They stacked the bundles the way you'd stack grain. They plowed a circle around the big stacks of grass as a firebreak. (They grew oats there to feed the horses before they plunked the stacks there.) They were very afraid of fire. In the fall they baled with a cotton baler, about 250 pounds each. After the reaper was invented, the grain binder tied the bundles with wire, but people didn't want wire in flour and animal feed. The grass was shipped by rail to the carpet factory in St. Paul. A lot of it was hauled to the train by horses. They'd stack about 128 bales to a railroad car.

Grass carpets, which were called the "sanitary rug," were used before the days of the vacuum cleaner. They put Crex carpets on the floors of banks, etc., as runners. They could roll up the runners at night. The dirt would fall through, and they could simply sweep under it and then roll it back.

Crex carpets were dyed and had a painted border and usually a big red rose in the middle of the rug. The Grantsburg Historical Society still has a sample 9'x12' rug.

1911	1912	1922	1925	1931-33	1934	1935	~1937
The "Big Meadows" (Crex Meadows) north of Grantsburg is purchased by the Crex Carpet Company.	Kreinersville, once a thriving village north of Crex, is abandoned due to a decline in the logging, blueberry, and cranberry industries.	Homesteaders report severe sandstorms. Farms in the sand country are selling for \$2.00 per acre.	Crex Carpeting Catalog advertises De Luxe Rugs for \$16.00. Imported grass rugs from Japan advertised for \$2.98.	Severe drought causes large wildfires in Burnett County. Many farms in the "sand country" are abandoned.	The buildings at Crex Carpet Camp Number 6 are torn down for salvage. Crex Carpet Company lists 23,000 acres of meadow land for sale.	Crex Carpet Company files for bankruptcy. Their bank statement shows a balance of \$24.90.	Bankrupt Crex Carpet Company lands revert to the ownership of Burnett County.

Previously, another attempt to profit from harvesting wiregrass met with no more success. The American Grass and Twine Company, from Amsterdam, New York, bought 10,000 acres of swamp land here around 1890, presumably to make twine from the wiregrass. But when hemp twine came in, they lost the market for wiregrass. Ray mentioned some people he thought had had an impact on the land. James Elwell bought 53,700 acres from the railroad in the sand country in Minnesota. Some of his purchases became a game refuge. Elwell put in 200 miles of ditches and roads—corduroy roads, with wood underneath. (Roads made over a base of logs would have had a bumpy texture like corduroy fabric.) They floated in the logs when the water was high in the spring. He sold the property as farmland for small down payments and high interest rates. He lost everything in 1892, then made a million again.

Big Gust (Anders Gustaf Anderson, 1901–1926), a well-known figure in Grantsburg, came from Sweden. He was 7' 6" tall and wore size 19 shoes. Although his height may have been intimidating, he was "gentle as a kitten." He was the



Ray joined the Friends of Crex Meadows because the wildlife area enhances his enjoyment of life.

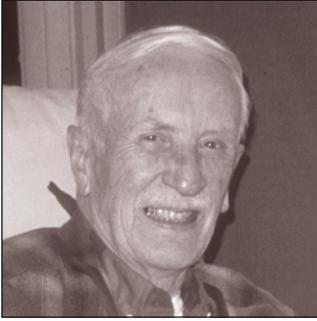
constable, and he bumped heads together when people raised cane. He kept order. He also served as the road supervisor and president of the fire department. He lived with his sister.

A photo of Arndt Bergerson, Ray's dad, is in the Grantsburg Historical Society. Ray used to take his dad to Grantsburg twice a year to look at the bogs and visit a friend. But when they were done smoking the cigar, it was time to go.

DNR staff at Crex Meadows told Ray about the Friends of Crex, so he joined. He gives a donation every year because the wildlife area enhances his enjoyment of life.

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

Crex Carpets were dyed and had a red border. They were called "The Sanitary Rug" because they were easy to sweep underneath.



**Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl, Jr.**

*Born: August 18, 1926*

EVEN THOUGH BUD NO LONGER LIVES in the area, he has maintained a long-term connection to the sand country and the people there. He has family connections there still, as Berdella Hanson Johnson is his sister-in-law.

Fran and Frederick Hamerstrom may have invested more in the central sands than the northwest barrens in Wisconsin, but their work in wildlife research certainly had an effect in the northwest sand country. They are mainly known for their interest in prairie chickens, but they were most interesting people, and there are a multitude of heartwarming anecdotes about them. When Bud was living in a log cabin on Spooner Lake, the Hamerstroms came to plan how to get county board support. They brought a bottle of bourbon to help strategize. Another time, Bud and Norm Stone went duck hunting with Fran and Frederick. It was October and the weather was pretty cold. Norm suggested they could tie a string to the decoy to pull and bob the decoy in the water to make it more attractive to ducks. Fran was just about to unravel a sock to get a string and go swimming to tie it to the decoy, but he stopped her from taking the freezing plunge.

Fran had an Eastern accent. She came from upper society in Boston to live in a simple farmhouse in the marsh at Plainfield, where the unpainted wood floors reflected the pioneers who had tried to farm the land. You never knew what she was going to cook up when you went to their house. False rumors flew that if you

wanted to avoid the possibility of owl or crow stew, you should bring your own sandwiches.

Aldo Leopold's book *Sand County Almanac* was not tied to the barrens or the northwest sand country, but it raised interest in sand country nonetheless. Leopold took bankrupt sandy land and restored it. When they were working on the land, he and his family lived in a chicken coop they fondly called "The Shack." He wrote eloquently about his experiences on the land there, and his writings inspired others with what could be done on sandy soils.

Wallace (Wally) Grange left the Wisconsin Conservation Department and set up his Sandhill Game Farm in the central Wisconsin sands near the town of Babcock. Now owned by the Wisconsin DNR, Wally's game farm has become the Sandhill Wildlife Area and includes the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center, where education programs such as hunter education or basic tracking are offered. Wally was another well-known conservation hero, and he too had an impact on interest in areas with sandy soil.

It was people like Leopold and Grange who inspired Bud and a partner to buy 80 acres of land north of Spooner at a county tax deed sale. The Pillbean farm, as it was referred to, was on infertile, sandy soils. Bud loved the place. They planted it to pine and enjoyed the lake, the stream, the diversity there, and the options to hunt, fish, and canoe.

"County Forests in Revolt" was a booklet Bud wrote. There was a battle with the foresters

*It was people like Leopold and Grange  
who inspired Bud and a partner to buy  
80 acres of land north of Spooner  
at a county tax deed sale.*

going on: politics in wood. Gaylord Nelson, the founder of Earth Day and then governor of the state of Wisconsin, and an influential man on many fronts, made the county forest system permanent. This certainly had an impact in the barrens. Gaylord grew up there, in Polk County. He supported the Outdoor Recreation Act program to acquire lands for outdoor recreation, a predecessor to the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program we have today.

Solon Springs, on the sandy plains of northwest Wisconsin, was a center for field trial dog training. The Field Dog Trial Association funded it, probably before World War II. Clare Winder was dean of the Dog Trainers Trial Dog School in the 1940s and '50s, maybe even the '30s.

Bud's father-in-law, Emil Hanson of Grantsburg, was a mailman. The mail carrier kept track of his customers. They were his friends, remnants of an earlier time, still hanging on in the sand barrens, oft-times living alone. He delivered their mail. When there were no tracks to the mailbox, he knew something was wrong. On two occasions when he investigated, he found his friends dead. These were people who had been conned into buying the land for farming, for which it was not suitable. The kids grew up and left, and they hung onto the house and continued to live there. They died alone with no health insurance or Social Security and no place to go but the county home. Their last vestige of independence was to cling to their house and count on the mailman's regular visits.

*The writings of Aldo Leopold  
inspired interest in sandy soils.*



*Gaylord Nelson came from Polk  
County to become Governor of  
Wisconsin. He made the county  
forest system permanent.*



*The wildlife research done by Fran and Frederick Hammerstrom  
(center and bottom) had an effect on the northwest sand country.*

PHOTOS: DNR ARCHIVE



**Robert John Becker**  
*Born: March 26, 1927*

A FREELANCE WRITER, BOB TOLD SOME stories about the old settlers and their struggles including their problems with diseases. Maybe the doctor in Spooner would be three to five horse-and-wagon hours away from someone in need. The flu of 1918, which swept through the country before Bob was born, left many grave markers. He heard that people went to the cemetery in the middle of the night to bury their dead, because of the quarantine.

Farms were small with a couple of cows and a horse. In winter the husband went to work in the logging camp, while the wife stayed home with the kids and livestock. Bob recounted a story about an isolated wife. He may have gotten the story from a book by Esther Gibbs. There were a lot of people on the move in those days, hobos and so on. The woman kept a Colt 45 army pistol under her pillow, in case she needed to protect herself while her husband was away. One night there was a noise. It sounded like someone breaking in. The woman shot right through the door. The noise stopped. She was afraid of what she might see when she opened the door. She thought she'd killed a man. But it was the pig she'd shot.

Bob mentioned an old settler family of two brothers who came from Canada to Spooner to settle in 1919. People lived on venison and fish; they didn't consider it illegal or out-of-season when they needed the food. In the 1920s and '30s, game and fish were a big part of people's diet, and, in the summertime, berries.

Now there is a network of trails that snowmobilers use, and most of the snowmobile activity takes

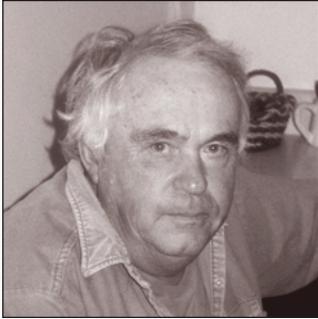
place on the trails. Snowmobilers are not just running over tree plantations and fields. People prefer the trails because they're safer—you won't run into barbed wire fences if you stay on trails. The new trespass law says you can't go on anybody's land without permission, period. It's your responsibility to know where you are. You can't just say "I'm lost" and escape.

One of the people Bob considers a hero for his impact on the land is Walter Rowlands. Walter worked at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He promoted zoning in northwest Wisconsin. Bob knew him back in the 1960s. There were costs involved in people moving out to the more remote areas. It cost to plow the back country roads for schools, etc. There was economic pressure to keep people from moving all over, to concentrate them in already populated areas. Bob says it's still pretty easy to get a variance. But his general philosophy is that "if you protect the natural resources, you protect the people."



*Bob has a collection of artifacts, a tribute to his interest in forestry and surveying.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Walter (Buck) Follis**

*Born: June 6, 1939*

BUCK AND HIS WIFE SHIRLEY HAVE FIVE kids, and all but one have stayed in the area, even after they've grown up. Many of the details Buck shared have to do with the remoteness of the barrens.

Buck had an aunt who taught school north of Brule. She made \$29 a month. Most people in the sand country were poor. Mrs. Fisher would harness the oxen and bring her to school. She rode home with the mailman, in his horse-drawn sleigh. Every half-mile or so the sleigh would tip over in the ruts. For a year, she taught in a school in Bayfield County, where she made \$30 a month. She always boarded with poor families in the barrens. She hated the barrens.

When Buck was sixteen or seventeen, he bought kegs of beer and had a big party in the barrens. In the late 1950s, kids went to the barrens to party. Big cars with big engines didn't stay on the roads well. There was drinking, and two or three kids got killed in motorcycle accidents. About fifteen years ago, in the early 1980s, high schools from Superior and Duluth were having graduation parties in the barrens. He went to the site of one big party after it was over. Beer cans and garbage were scattered around, even the leg off a pair of pants. Evidence of wheel rims showed that when the party-goers ran out of firewood, they burned spare tires. The fathers of those kids must have been pretty mad when they discovered they had no spare tires. Lawn chairs were burned and strewn in the lake, and clothes were up in the trees. The place looked like a dump. Several hundred kids had been there. The town chairman was very upset. But that sort

of thing doesn't happen much any more. There are more chemical/alcohol free parties now. Buck lived right on Highway 27. He knew exactly when parties were going on out there. He saw all the cars.

There was a little church out in the barrens that got torn down and its graveyard plowed under. Nobody knows exactly where it was, but one friend of Buck's found a piece of glass from a church window there. It was easy for things to disappear out there.

One old friend went to Rush Lake in the barrens. His horse got away and disappeared in the darkness. He had to walk all the way home. When he got there, there was the horse waiting at the barn.

"Another old girl lived on the edge of the barrens." Mary Hanson was called "Scrub Pail Mary." One night Buck's uncle was doing chores in the barn when there was a knock. It was Scrub Pail Mary. Her man had hung himself in the barn. There was a bad storm, and it had taken Mary a couple of days to get to town to get help. Buck's uncle went to the switchboard to call the sheriff to come in a sleigh to haul the dead man out of there. Even when Buck was a kid, there were hardly any phones in people's homes around there. Each town had a switchboard. The sheriff was far away in Superior.

When it was announced that the town was going to gravel the town road, Buck heard some skier say that would make it tough on cross-country skiing. "Hey," said Buck, "the roads are for cars." Most roads in the area are not plowed unless there's a logging operation going on there.



**Lyndon Arthur Smith**

*Born: February 1, 1913*

**Grace Maxon Smith**

*Born: February 22, 1917*

LYNNY LIVES WITH HIS WIFE, GRACE, IN Spooner. She joined us at the end of the interview.

From his boyhood around Trego and Minong, Lynny remembers winter winds that drifted snow into hard banks. You could walk on the drifted snow then, though you can't now because there's more forest cover. He had fun skiing on home-made skis. He preferred to make them out of white ash. He'd make a little form. He'd soak the ends of the skis in boiling water to bend them and put them in the form. When the wood dried, it would stay in that shape, with curved ends. Then he'd carve points on the ends and use a piece of harness strap to keep his feet on them. He remembered a snowstorm in February 1922, the year he moved to Minong. The storm dropped 48 inches of snow, then rained on top. You could walk on top of the ice. Lynny skied over to Whalen Lake to see if an old bachelor he knew was all right. The fellow was, but that was still the worst snowstorm Lynny can remember. The railroad had to use rotary plows to open the tracks again for the trains. Lynny walked the three-quarters of a mile to school, barefooted, on the first bare ground of spring. One year they got a snowstorm in May, and his dad had to come with horses and boots so he could go home. When school let out at 4:00 p.m., it was dark, and he could hear coyotes howling. His dad would come to meet him with a kerosene lantern, especially when it was cold.

They didn't have as many things in those days as people seem to have today. Lynny's dad had \$100 once in his life. But he had to take a train trip to

help with his brother's funeral, and that took part of the \$100. The school Lynny attended in Minong was two stories, with four classrooms, a wood burning furnace, and coal. You used both wood and coal. There was one "kitten ball" or soft-ball for the whole school, or at least for his grade. There were no cars or bikes around the school. In those days you didn't lock your house. Lynny's dad "never owned a padlock or a key."

There was a family that lived near Lynny's family, with kids approximately the same ages as Lynny and his brothers. Lynny's dad and the neighbor both played fiddles so the kids had to sit around and be quiet when they had company. They didn't have any radios then, though Lynny's uncle did have a phonograph that played Edison cylinder records.

Lynny learned to play the guitar in 1931. His dad came home from the lumber camp sick in January of that year. His dad was dying when he



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Judith Pratt-Shelley**  
*Born: January 24, 1959*

asked Lynny to play for him, and Lynny couldn't do it. He's felt bad about that missed opportunity ever since. His father had some liver problem. He never drank alcohol and was only 48 when he died of nephritis.

When Lynny first came to Washburn County, there was a fellow named D.O. Brewer who ran a little store out at Five Mile Creek, west of Minong. One day a young man was going to hold up the store and he shot Mr. Brewer in the eye with a 32 caliber pistol. The shot put his eye out but didn't kill him. Lynny remembers when he used to come to town with a team of horses. They'd play cards in the barbershop. Lynny hasn't gambled since he lost thirty-five cents in a barbershop card game, all those years ago.

Lynny took up square dance calling professionally in 1959. Square dancing got real popular in the 1960s. It was fun. He got to meet all kinds of people from all walks of life. A couple of people even "got hitched" meeting at a square dance. The dances created friendships that still linger.

Lynny and his wife, Grace, like to walk a lot. For a while, Lynny lived three-quarters of a mile from the ranger station where he worked, but when he transferred to the ranger station in Spooner, they lived only a block from his work. Grace said Lynny always came home for lunch every day, unless there was a fire. In Grace's family, her mother never sat down with her family to eat. She waited on everybody else and read to them while they ate. Grace said this instilled a love of reading in her. She said, "The Smith men are very kind; they never fight with their wives."

JUDY WORKED IN RESTAURANTS FOR fourteen years, but now she works at the Tribal Center in Red Cliff. She's glad there are no phone booths out there in the sand country, no RV parks. She doesn't like all the development, and she hates to see clearcuts. Judy doesn't like the four-wheeled traffic. The ATVs shouldn't be able to go everywhere and tear up the environment. She thinks the amount of roads should be limited and there should be only certain spots designated for ATV and RV use so everybody doesn't have such easy and potentially destructive access to the whole area.

On the other hand, she would like to see more information out there for people to see the value of the area: information about the rare plants, the wildlife, the wolves, and the value of the barrens in recharging ground water for drinking.

Judy believes the land should be managed for the future, not just for our generation today, but for seven generations ahead. She would also like to see the treaty rights of the tribes recognized "so we don't have to fight to be included in management." We should "hire a few more mothers to manage the land; they would add nurturing."



*Judy believes the land should be managed for the future, with ATV and other potentially destructive access limited to designated places.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Albert Lorin Lord**

*Born: March 24, 1931*

**Gladys Lord Sampson**

*Born: August 23, 1911*

AL SAID HE HAS CHIPPEWA BLOOD ON both sides of his family. His mother's grandmother Lagoo was from the Lake Superior Chippewa band. She married a white trader named Arbuckle on Madeleine Island and the band kicked her out. She moved to Hudson, then later to Shell Lake, where their daughter, Maggie Arbuckle, married Al's grandfather, Andy Powers. Andy was an Englishman from New Brunswick, Canada, who came here to work in lumber. On the other side of Al's family, Chief Osagee's daughter married a Lord. Al's Aunt Gladys is his father's sister.

Al talked about the flu of 1918. When everyone was sick from the flu, Al's grandmother went to see how the people on the land next to theirs were doing. Two of the three boys were already dead, and the remaining family members were expecting the third to die immanently. Al's grandmother went to town to bring the medicine woman. She gathered herbs in the woods, and the boy survived. In addition to what herb you give someone, it matters how much you give the person, Al explained. Al's uncle and his dad were harvesting timber in Washington when the flu came. They nursed each other through it. Gladys' younger sister, Katherine, had the flu badly. Gladys' older sister didn't get the flu. She had to hitch up the horses and get the doctor every day.

There is a seven-mile long lake that looks like an Indian silhouette. Gladys lived across the lake, on the east side. People drove across the lake when it was frozen in winter. There were actually four lanes across the lake. Now Lake Street goes to the lake. There used to be a cable car there.

People hauled the horses across and back in the evening on a barge.

There were no black top roads in the barrens years ago. The roads were all sand, and, in the summer, they got hot on bare feet. There was nothing but brush for miles, no big trees, except a couple of point Norways left.

Gladys said her dad came on the first train from Superior to Solon Springs. She wishes there still were passenger trains. Al said he went from Tomah to St. Paul on a train. The train had to go backward from Duluth to Superior to let the passengers off because there was no way to turn the train around at that end.

Al said his great-grandfather, Charlie Lord, moved the trading post from Brule to the Solon Springs area because of the railroad. His grandfather's people came by railroad after the Civil War. Grandpa Lucius was in the Libby Prison in the South during the Civil War. The other Northern prisoners were turned against the Indians. They couldn't bear



*The road goes right to the lake. People drove across the lake when it was frozen in winter.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Solon Springs used to be a rugged lumber town, Gladys explained. Her Uncle Charlie had a saloon there.*

arms against the South any more. Sioux uprisings in southern Minnesota during the Civil War led to the plan to hang some Indians in Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Lincoln stopped the hangings. “They weren’t even going to hang the right people.”

Al grew up living in the house that used to be Gladys’ home. It had been a one-room schoolhouse. Al’s dad bought it from the town. Previously, the school property had belonged to the Posey’s, an African-American family, who sold it to the town. Walter Posey was a barber. He also sang in the church choir. His wife played the piano. Some Black families, perhaps including the Posey’s, had come to the area after the Civil War.

On the hill near Al’s house today, there used to be a “house of ill repute.” Teamsters and sawyers came by on the trail from logging operations or sawmills and saw the tents on the hill. Solon Springs used to be a rugged lumber town, Gladys explained. Her Uncle Charlie had a saloon there.



*Al grew up living in a house that used to be a one-room schoolhouse. Now he lives just across the drive.*

Growing up Indian in the sand country was hard. “They didn’t like us,” Al explained. There was a “White” ball team and an “Indian” ball team. Al got in a fight when a guy called his mother a “squaw.” His birth certificate read “White and Indian.” Gladys remembered having to get a parent to sign her nationality on a paper for school. Her dad always put “American.” In the place where the form asked for the occupation of her mother, her mother wrote, “raising children.” She had fourteen children of her own, but raised sixteen. Al and Gladys both remembered being poor, “but everyone else was then too.”

Al says they live along the Continental Divide. The Brule River runs north, and the St. Croix goes south. His grandfather carried mail from Superior to Milwaukee on the water trail by canoe. The trip



*Being defined as Indian was hard for both Al and Gladys when they were growing up.*

PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

*These are old survey notes like those federal surveyors used to claim the land where the Indian village was.*

**Albert Lorin Lord**

**Gladys Lord Sampson** *(continued)*

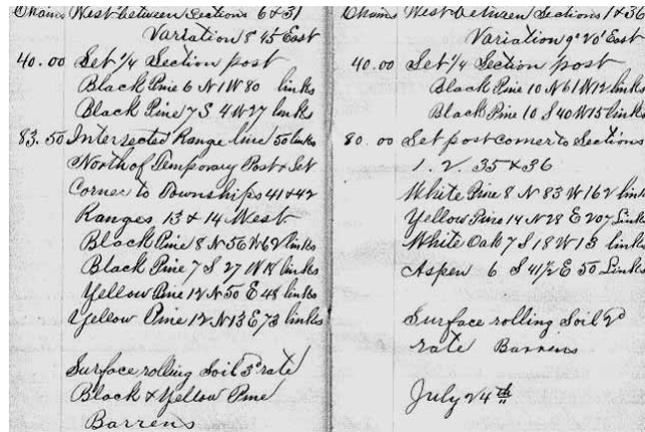
took two weeks. Al's grandfather was a young man then (born 1865, the day after Lincoln died) so this was probably around 1885. Not to be outdone, Gladys said her dad was the first postmaster in Solon Springs. However, he was not appointed by the governor, but was self-appointed.

With only a sixth grade education, Grandpa Albert Leo Lord surveyed the country. His posts are still used today. He was a big guy, over six feet tall, a Frenchman who was part Indian. He wore a mustache. He grew a ten-foot sunflower and had his picture taken by it, so there's a record of what he looked like.

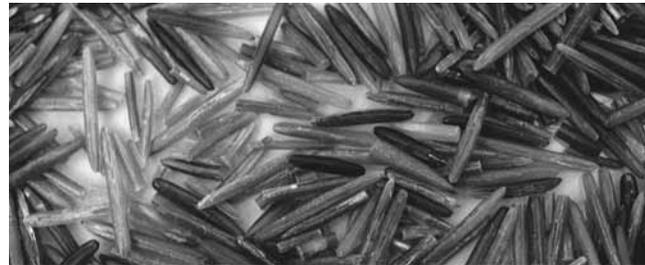
The surveyors were important people. At one point, Grandpa Osagee went to claim land and was told that federal surveyors had already claimed it. Federal surveyors claimed the land where the Indian village was. That's how Al's family was beat out of Wisconsin Point; it was by federal surveyors.

Al's great-great-grandfather, Joseph Osagee, was Chief of the Fond du Lac Indians. (The Fond du Lac Band in Cloquet, Minnesota, was Al's family's reservation.) Joseph Osagee married Katherine. Their daughter married Charlie Lord. By the time Charlie came to the Osagees, the missionaries had already been there, so Charlie had to get married. He couldn't just take a woman for his camp.

Al said that the Chippewa were Algonquin, initially New York Indians. The Iroquois were beating them back to Sault St. Marie. Finally a decisive battle turned the Iroquois back. Half the Chippewa went north of Lake Superior and half went south. The Sioux captured Chief Buffalo's son. The Sioux said they would exchange the son



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PHOTOS: GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

*With treaty rights, the Chippewa have the right to go out ricing before non-Indians. It used to be only Indians who harvested rice.*

Gladys' mother used to have twenty-five to thirty people over for Sunday dinner. Cousins just showed up. Extended family meant something.

for the Chief. When the exchange was made, they killed the Chief. The son took revenge when he grew up, by slaughtering the Fox, allies of the Sioux, and chasing the Sioux across Minnesota. Eventually, White traders came and brought peace between the Sioux and Chippewa peoples, in order to trade. However, there is still some enmity between the Sioux and Chippewa, according to Al.

Further west, Buffalo soldiers were sent to kill the Indians. African Americans' hair seemed to be kinky, like buffalo fur, thus the name. Tribal people didn't appreciate African Americans because they were sent to kill them initially, but Al says there's been a lot of intermarriage now.

Among the tribes, the division of people into clans served as a way to control bloodlines, to prevent inbreeding. The clans were mostly lost in the 1700s, he figures.

Al mentioned that the tribes in Minnesota are still fighting for their treaty rights, but in Wisconsin the Chippewa have the right to hunt. With treaty rights, the Chippewa have the right to go out ricing before non-Indians too. It used to be only Indians who harvested rice. Now there's a season for ricing, and non-Indians can purchase a permit. Time has changed the balance between Whites and Indians. The tribes were permitted to start casinos when gambling was allowed, though only the tribes can have casinos in the state. There are casinos run by the tribes in the Northwest Sands Area now.

Al said Indians weren't into owning things as much as White people were. He never locked his place except once when he went to Florida for a

couple of weeks. Then he had to have new locks. He didn't even know where the keys were.

Gladys' mother, Al's grandmother, used to have twenty-five to thirty people over for Sunday dinner. Cousins just showed up. The extended family meant something to them. Gladys' mom always set an extra place at the table. That table was eighteen feet long. Everybody had to help clear the table. The ladies ate last, and then they washed up.

Al said his grandmother told stories in one room, year round, summer and winter. When they listened to the radio, they ran it off the battery from the car.

One story Al remembered from the Anishinabe or First People (Ojibwa/Chippewa) was about Spider.

*The people were living in total darkness.*

*They sent Spider up to find light above.*

*Then the people climbed up into the light.*

The spider is honored in Chippewa tradition, because it was the first one to see light.

Solon Springs used to include 200 people in winter, but the ranks would swell in summer to 2,000. The summer influx of vacationers would boost not only the population, but the economy of the area as well. Husbands would leave their families vacationing in the area all summer while they stayed home and worked. The younger generations failed to maintain the summerhouses, and "the DNR won't let you build if you don't keep boathouses up." Hence there are very few boathouses remaining. "It makes for a nicer looking shoreline without boathouses," Al concluded.



**Kay Ramel Karras**

*Born: June 19, 1918*

**Helen Rein**

*Born: October 9, 1918*

TWO FRIENDS WHO SHARED AN interview, Helen and Kay, reminisced about going to small schools. Helen walked a mile to school each way. She carried the drinking water for the school for \$3 a month. The school consisted of one room, with only seven students. The teacher boarded with her family, so she didn't get by with much. When she was about twelve, though, she did get in a fight with her boyfriend. He took her skis and shoved them downhill, so she punched him, and he punched her back. They both had to miss recess for a week. The teacher reported the incident to her mom, and Helen had to do dishes at home for a week too. Now the old school is a resort cabin.

Kay said the teacher in her little country school west of Solon had to get to school early to start the fire to warm the place up. There were eight grades in one room at her school. She remembers

the first time she skipped school. She played the afternoon away in the woods. Her brother told her dad, and she got spanked. She didn't skip school again until she was in high school. In high school, she had to walk 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles each way.

Helen worked in Milwaukee at the defense plant during World War II. When the war was over, she came home and contracted to work on a mail route. While she worked on the mail route, she had some interesting experiences. One day, when Helen was working the mail route, a woman shoved a gun through the car window and asked her to take it because she said her son was going to kill her and her husband with it. The parents took the son to social services, and he was put in a foster home after that. Helen was so reliable on the mail route, she said people could set their clocks by her stopping at their mailbox. She quit the mail route when she was denied a raise, and a



*Helen's school, similar to this one, consisted of one room with only seven students.*



PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

*There were eight grades in one room at her school.*

man who was hired to do the job tried to contract with her to accomplish the work. Then, for seventeen years, Helen worked on the local ambulance as an EMT (emergency medical technician). Helen retired from that job at age sixty-seven.

Kay worked for the post office too. When her brother, Nick, was drafted into the service, she got his job at the post office in Solon Springs. She retired years later, from the post office in Bennett, and she still lives in that area now. For a while before that, she worked for Dahlberg Light and Power Company. Dahlberg Light and Power came before World War II. It was one of the biggest employers in the area. Once on that job, Kay had to go out and read meters. She remembers driving from house to house until she lost track and didn't know how to get home. Kay met her husband, Jim, while she was working at Dahlberg Light and Power. His grandparents knew her folks and she his aunt, so they figured it wasn't out of line to go on a date. For their first date, they went to a local bar.

Helen met her husband when he was working at Lucas Lumber Mill, and she was tending bar at Prevost. He came in with all the guys. He'd been married before and had two girls; she'd been married before and had two boys. He asked her out, and they went dancing, the two-step. They always took their friends, Maxine and Luke, a married couple, along when they went out.

Helen recalled the field trials they held on the barrens to train dogs. The trials were started by Dr.

Truman Smith, a dentist from Superior who had a cabin. People stopped on their way to Canada to train their dogs there. The trials happened in the spring and fall, usually Friday to Sunday. People paid to enter the trials, and the prizes were money. There was a meeting the night before, where participants got to draw for their places in the trials. Her dad rented horses to the judges and the sixty to seventy people who rode horses or wagons to follow the dogs. Her mom raised grouse for running the dogs. Her mom also cooked and served food, stretching the length of the tables to feed all the hungry people. Helen got out of school to wait tables and do dishes there. The field trials still happen, but it's not as big an event as it used to be. Even though the old-timers are gone, the trials are still a local tradition.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Lafayette Connor**  
*Born: March 29, 1900*

FAYE WAS A BARBER ALL HIS LIFE. HE wasn't quite old enough to be in World War I, but he registered. He got called just before the armistice, but he was never actually in the service. At age sixteen, he started in the barber business. An established barber asked him to come in on Saturday and lather up men to be shaved. He mixed the lather and rubbed it into the whiskers of the "old salts." As a barber, he said he got the first news: who did or didn't do it, who left town, and so on. Barbers were the forerunners of sanitation. They tried to teach people to keep their hair clean and take a bath once a week. It was twenty-five cents for a bath on Saturday night. Heating water was a problem. People seemed to believe that, if they washed their hair, all their hair would come out. You could smell it when people never washed their hair. You could probably smell if someone had a sore throat too—they'd tie a dirty sock around the person's neck. Only since World War I have we learned scientific ways of using sanitation. Faye says he learned a lot of psychology cutting people's hair. People would try to tell him tall tales, but he read about things and caught their silly stories. In 1952, he went to Greenland to work as a barber and bartender. He spent two years in Greenland.

The second interview with Faye, when he was 100 years old, ended when another gentleman came up the back steps, leaning on a cane. Faye said the other fellow had come for a haircut.

Faye recollected his first teacher: Ida Lepine. On the first day of school, it was raining, and his moccasins were wet. Ida set them by the stove to dry. The moccasins dried up hard and stiff, but

she limbered them up for him. The other kids laughed at him, but she didn't. He fell in love with his teacher that day. He was only five.

He never got a chance to go to high school. He had a glandular disease, along with tonsillitis. He couldn't finish eighth grade because of his health. As an alternative, he went to the library and read a lot.

Faye remembered the flu of 1918. He said he had it. He took Anacin for the first time, "the headache medicine." Well, maybe it was aspirin. He remembered his mom's heels clicking across the floor when she was taking care of everyone. He felt well enough to milk the cows after taking the pills, but then he got the chills. The flu gave you terrible chills. He carried aspirin with him all the time. He ordered a gallon of whiskey as a treatment, but then he got a letter saying he had a job in Minneapolis, and the whiskey didn't come until he'd already left home. Then he got a letter from his dad saying "that whiskey really saved our lives!" The old-timers would tell you that whiskey helped when they got the shakes. As for aspirin, Indians knew it came from the inner bark of trees long ago. A doctor sent to care for the Indians with the flu tried to give them aspirin, but they wouldn't take the pills. They had a bag of brown stuff, pulverized bark mixed with brown sugar. They took this, but wouldn't take the doctor's pills from a little bottle.

After a brief time in Minneapolis, Faye went to Montana where he worked as a barber. There he saw Indian hand language for the first time. He couldn't follow it, and he thought the people he was with would all burst out laughing.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



DNR ARCHIVE

*Left: Faye has painted many scenes of traditional Indian life.*

*Right: Faye thought Governor Knowles was important as a conservationist. He was in favor of planting trees.*

Faye was twenty-seven when he married. His wife, Marie (her full name was Maryanne), was a customer with curly black hair. He talked her into getting a haircut. She never let her hair grow long again. She became a beautician. They had one boy who married a woman with eight children. They live nearby.

Faye talked about some of his relatives. He had an uncle who was a postmaster and an aunt who delivered babies. Once that aunt delivered a baby for a fourteen-year-old mother. The young mother's mother and grandmother were there helping with the birth. Faye's aunt came in a little canoe to take the young mother to St. Croix. They couldn't save the mother, but they did save the baby. Faye said tears came out of his aunt's eyes when she told the story. When someone asked, "Elizabeth, what did you do?" she just replied, "What the hell could you do?" She took the baby to another Indian family to nurse the baby. At that time, Faye explained, there were no jobs, the country was bankrupt, and people didn't have cows. Indian women married young in those days.

Faye's dad's father, Benjamin Connor, was part Indian and married a full-blooded Indian; he was a Civil War veteran with knowledge of a compass, so he was a surveyor in the army. Faye learned about compasses and measurements from his dad, who used to say, "You'll go to school and learn to read and write or else!" "Or else

what?" Faye still wondered as he neared 100 years of age. Faye's dad was a logger; he was a good-sized man, and he liked to work. But Faye said Indian dads never punished their kids.

Faye's mom was a robust, busty woman. She nursed her kids. She named the boys after people in history (Lafayette from the Revolutionary war, Dewey from the Spanish War, and Rupert from Prince Rupert) and the girls after jewels (Ruby and Pearl). His brothers and sisters all lived a pretty long time, although they, like his father, were diabetic. Many of his relatives suffered amputations as a result of diabetes.

When asked about some of the people who had impact on the sand country, Faye mentioned Robert La Follette, who was Governor of Wisconsin then a United States Senator in the early 1900s. Faye said he was the first one to say that children there were starving, and he organized a group of women's clubs to furnish lunch at school. People laughed him off the podium, and the idea didn't carry through. There wasn't a successful lunch program until many years later. Faye thought Governor Knowles was important as a conservationist. He was in favor of planting trees. Faye also appreciated Franklin D. Roosevelt: he changed this country more than anyone, except that he told farmers to kill off all the little pigs so the big pig farmers' pigs would go up in value. The voices of local politicians didn't reach far in those days. The telephone was all you had.



**Lolita Spooner Taylor**

*Born: July 19, 1908*

IN PAST YEARS, LOLITA WAS PART OF THE Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwa in Minnesota, even though she lived in Burnett County, Wisconsin, all her life. She graduated from Webster High School in 1925, when she was only sixteen. (She skipped a grade.)

Lolita was only 18 months apart from her sister, who kept telling her about this wonderful Indian fellow she danced with. Lolita finally danced with Ollie. After that, they were married for 37 years, and they never quit dancing together. That was in the days of the big bands.

Lolita's Ojibwa name is Shawinoquay. Her husband, Ollie Taylor, was three-quarters Ojibwa and very interested in Ojibwa traditions. His interest spurred her own. She and her cousin Michael Spooner published an Ojibwa legend in a children's storybook: *Old Meshikee and the Little Crabs*. Michael heard her tell a story to his little girl and helped her publish the book. She also wrote a book called *Ojibwa: The Wild Rice People*.

When Lolita began writing as a girl, she used a quill pen, then pencils and fountain pens until the ballpoint came into vogue. She used a manual and then an electric typewriter. At the time of the interview she demonstrated how she keeps pace with the new millennium by writing at a computer.

Lolita talked about the Ojibwa story of creation, based on Basil Johnston's book, *Ojibway Heritage*.

*Out of nothing, the Creator made rock, water, fire, wind, the sun, stars and moon, and the earth. He made the plant beings and the animals. Last of all, he made man and gave him the power of vision. Gitchee Manitou made all things for harmony, and the people are part of that natural harmony.*

When boys and girls came of age, there were some traditions among the Ojibwa. When a girl had her first period, she was isolated from the rest of the household until her period was over. When a boy reached puberty, he went out and searched for a name spirit. He fasted for four days and then went on a vision quest. "Nothing is done without a vision in the Ojibwa way."

Lolita said childbirth among the Indians was a natural occurrence. Around 1939, she knew a woman who was out picking blueberries when she had a baby. She just went home, fine. However, Lolita said she herself was in the hospital ten days after each of her children was born. "That made you weak." Thirty years ago, pregnant women could not go into the classroom. Now they can teach until the baby comes.

Lolita knew about her grandfather, William B. Connor, because her mother told her, and her grandpa left information in his notes. Her

# People



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Lolita shares a photo of an ancestor.*



grandfather was a surveyor, a timber cruiser, and a “locator.” A locator helped people find their homesteads. He also ran a post office. He was elected “Pathmaster.” There were no roads or bridges then, so he laid them out. In 1884, Grandpa took his homestead. He built a log schoolhouse on his place in 1895. Grandpa was half Indian. He knew the names of birds and knew what was going on in nature. Lolita went on long walks with him and learned many of the Indian names.

Lolita’s grandmother was the busiest person. She fed the mail carriers. Sometimes they stayed over night. Although Grandpa was not a farmer, they had cows and pigs. Grandma fed everybody, did the dishes, and milked the cows.

Asked about people who had an impact on the land in the sand country, she said she didn’t know Edward L. Peet, but he loved the sand country and had a vision of building a town on County F, between Danbury and Grantsburg. He promoted immigration to Burnett County and wrote a book telling people what wonderful farming land this was. He was mistaken, of course, but he wasn’t purposely lying.

John Coit Spooner was a lawyer who secured land for the railroad and became a U.S. senator. The town of Spooner was named after him. His ancestors came over from England in the 1600s; Lolita shares the same ancestors. Judge Taylor is her nephew.



**Dorothy Frosch**

*Born: March 1, 1916*

DOROTHY MOVED TO WASCOTT, Wisconsin, from Lamont, Illinois, in 1963. She married Bill Frosch in 1960, and they had their honeymoon in Minong/Wascott. She fell in love with the sand country the first day she was there. Bill's brother, Frank, had a cottage in the area, and Bill and Dorothy thought they wanted to retire there. When a fellow from Bill's work returned from a trip up there to fish, he told Bill, "Andy's gas station is for sale." Dorothy called a friend and asked him to look into Andy's station. After that, everything happened quickly. On Friday she did the arranging, and she and Bill drove up on Saturday and stayed until Tuesday. They bought the gas station. Andy stayed with it until they could take over. They made arrangements for someone to dig a basement and get lumber to build their home in 1962. Bill and Frank came up first, in 1963. She came up a few months later, after she sold the house in Illinois. The gas station was important because people depended on it. They couldn't shut it down. But they also couldn't make a living. They couldn't pay the electric bill. There were a couple of times she "sat by the driveway and bawled" because things were hard. It took her five years to make up her mind, but when Links had an ad in the paper for a bookkeeper, she got the job and worked doing payroll. After Frank had a heart attack and couldn't do heavy work, she and Bill bought out her brother-in-law. One day a realtor asked if they'd sell the gas station. "Yes!!!" Bill worked at Links then too.

It was different living in Wascott than in Lamont, where she had lived before. In Illinois she'd had a full schedule, but here people are relaxed. At first she didn't even have a phone, but Kay, her neighbor had one, so they arranged to share the phone line and have it ring at Dorothy's house too. "People share here," she said.

*Now Dorothy considers  
the area "congested."  
But people love the area and  
"plan to retire here."*

However, Dorothy also says the area is different now than it used to be. When she first came here, there were only two other people who lived near her year round. Now she considers the area "congested." But people love the area and "plan to retire here."

Dorothy says there are too many people here now. There are campgrounds all around the lake. Neighbors got a petition against the campground, but it was put in anyway. Now there are trailers around and too many campgrounds. She thinks people should build on bigger lots and maintain bigger spaces, and houses should be built farther away from the lake. She likes the regulation about that. She is glad of such restrictions because she likes the wild look of the land.

# People

*Dorothy likes the wild look of the land.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Dorothy fell in love with the sand country the first day she was there.*



DNR ARCHIVE

*Dorothy says there are too many people here now. There are campgrounds all around the lake.*

The neighbors always went down to Kay's Tavern to celebrate. There was a jukebox there, and there were parties. "One lady got new false teeth, so we celebrated that too!" "Who wants to give it up? Not I!"

Tony Jelich, a retired DNR warden, is one of her heroes. He showed Dorothy her first bear and gave her trees to plant. Also, he was largely responsible

for getting an iron sculpture of an Indian scout put up in Solon Springs, on St. Croix Lake. He contacted the Indians in the area and got input saying the sculpture should be a Native American rather than a French voyageur. Tony wrote a book called *Stop and Smell the Cedars* (1993).

During the interview, November 12, 1998, there were three knocks at the door. People were out looking for the father of one of Dorothy's neighbors. The man suffered from Alzheimer's and apparently wandered away. It was 9:00 at night, and it was dark and very cold. Helicopters and all the local people were out searching. This seemed to be an example of the kind of neighborly support and sharing that Dorothy said she loved about the place.

Her family back in Illinois kept asking Dorothy to return there. Her dad was a stoic Swede. You didn't argue with him. Her family is still trying to get her to move, but she keeps saying "No way!"



**William Soderbeck**

*Born: May 30, 1915*

**Alice Johnson Soderbeck**

*Born: October 6, 1914*

BILL AND ALICE SODERBECK SHARED memories from their home in Grantsburg. The sand country was mostly populated with Swedes when they were growing up. Alice said there would have been trouble if Norwegians had come to the neighborhood.

Alice's dad, Anton Johnson, cooked in lumber camps. He cooked in a double tent part of the winter and also worked in a boxcar, cooking for the men laying railroad to Canada. He was gone so much that Alice and her mom stayed at Alice's grandparents' house. When she started going to school, her dad became a butcher and stayed home.

Alice's mom baked with "Snowflake" flour. There was a lady who made dresses out of flour sacks. One said "Pillsbury" on it. The lady put "satisfaction guaranteed" on the front part of a dress once.

When Alice was four, her grandfather came in a horse and buggy to tell her mother that World War I was over. Her uncle was in the trenches in Europe so the war was of concern to her family. She remembers that there was no one to play with at the time, so she was listening to the adults.

Alice also remembers the flu of 1918. Her dad had it first, then she and her mom. She said she was so hot that she kept trying to get all the covers off. The neighbors left a bag of oranges on the step, though they didn't come into the house. Those were the best oranges Alice ever ate.

Alice went to a rural one-room schoolhouse in elementary school. Now it's been remodeled. But she remembers being afraid she'd get lost in high school in the village. But her high school was a small one too: only seventeen people in that high school.

Bill talked about the Riverdale Ferry his dad built in 1922. Bill remembered the Gypsies who rode the ferry. They'd say "We'll pay when we come back," but Bill's dad would say, "You'll pay then too." It cost fifty cents a trip, one way. The old Gypsy woman was "the boss": "She made the decisions. She had black hair, and she wore many big skirts. She'd have to peel her skirts back to get at her moneybag." The Gypsies had chickens with them and would tie the chickens to a tree at night so they wouldn't run away.

Bill said they hauled circuses across on the ferry too. There were mules pulling army wagons, with big cages on the wagons. They'd fill the ferry with ponies. They loaded everything they could on at once, because Bill's dad charged them by the trip. The elephants waded across the rapids, but the ponies rode on the ferry. Alice said she hid in the brush to see the circus animals. Her dad got tickets to the Chautauqua, the big-top show, where they went to see plays and hear music, instead of the circus, so she really wanted to see those animals.

They hauled bootleggers on the ferry too. They were the only ones that had money in those hard times. They could hide their stills in the jack pines. The sheriff, Charlie Saunders, would find a still and destroy it. The kids got pieces of corn sugar to suck on when that happened. But by the time they had the trial, somebody had drunk all the evidence. In the 1920s and 30s, nobody got the tax money from the sale of alcohol, since selling it was illegal. Everybody knew who the bootleggers were. If you asked a boy "who makes sunshine?" the answer would be "God." But if

*Bill talked about the Riverdale Ferry his Dad built.*

you asked the same boy “who makes moonshine?” he’d give you a bootlegger’s name.

Alice said the gravel pit on their property still makes money. There’s white sand below the gravel that’s useful for sandboxes. And a man is experimenting with it to make white cement. They first sold gravel to the county in the early ’40s. Tons of white sand from their quarry (about 18,000) was put into blacktop for miles outside of Grantsburg.

Bill’s mother always said, “Money don’t grow on trees!” But on her 60th birthday, Bill and his brother made a money tree for her and put 60 silver dollars on it. His mom said other sayings too, such as “From the cradle to the hearse, there’s nothing so bad but it coulda been worse.”

There was an old Hungarian man named Josef Weber who stayed with Bill and Alice for about eight years. He worked in the garden and carried wood and water for them. His kids lived with him at first, then he sold his cattle and everything. He had to move to his neighbor’s and eventually to Alice and Bill’s. He lived in a shack on the property for a while, then the shack burned, and he lived in the big house. Bill and Alice gave him food and a bed in exchange for his work. His knees were bad with arthritis, but he tried to keep going. They raised navy and kidney beans so he’d sort beans in the winter. He made a braided rug too. In the summer he’d work in the garden. He’d fish sometimes while he was working in the garden. One day Bill heard him yelling. He had a sturgeon that was about four feet long and he couldn’t land it himself. Bill helped him. He’d keep the fire going in the smokehouse when they butchered the hogs too.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

But one day the smokehouse burned up except for one little chunk of ham. “Joe got a little wild on the fire.” Grease drips on the fire when you smoke meat. Luckily, the road worked as a firebreak. People took advantage of Joe. He saved up \$700 from his pension for his funeral. After all the expenses were paid, the rest was to go to Alice for doing his washing, but only about \$10 was left. Bill and Alice’s youngest daughter saw him as her grandfather. She cried when he died. He always brought home candy for the kids.

Governor Knowles was a man Bill considered to have had an impact on the sand country. Governor Knowles tried to preserve the sand country for hunting, fishing, and wildlife.

Jake Riegel is another man who had some affect on the sand country. He was an outspoken doctor from St. Croix Falls who told people what he thought. He was a conservationist before being a conservationist was popular, before Crex Meadows was established. Bill said Jake wore black wool underwear. Sometimes that was all he wore. He looked like an old bear walking around. Jake had a sauna and would say, “Come on up and get clean!” Now Bill and Alice have a sauna of their own. They built it for some hunters from Racine. The hunters sent a sauna stove up to Bill and Alice as a token of appreciation.



**Betty Donis  
Lockert Hanson**

*Born: January 18, 1934*

BETTY LOVED HER LIFE GROWING UP on a farm in the Fish Lake area. She didn't know her family was poor until she reached high school. Then she could never find a dime. They had to pay for the school bus, if they could, and ten cents fed all five kids lunches for one day, at two cents a lunch in grade school. She had to ride a humiliating square bus to school—an ugly little box they called the “Blue Goose.” The other buses were rounded. Kids teased her getting on the ugly red, white, and blue bus. She had to wear brown stockings to grade school too because it was cold. White socks were more expensive; only the “rich kids” wore white ones. The mail only came three times a week in those

days. They got their water from an outside pump and they used an outhouse, decorated with pictures of movie stars thumb-tacked to the wall. In the winter it was so cold upstairs that she could see her breath inside the house. Betty said she would dance on the floor because it was so cold she didn't want to put her feet down. She would stand on the heat register and hate to move. In the summer it was so hot upstairs, without air conditioning or a fan, that she would lie with her head out the window, and it barely helped. Betty's family didn't have electricity until 1954.

Thinking of the outhouse on the farm sparked a few memories. During the canning season, the peaches came wrapped in tissue. They used the soft peach papers for toilet paper. One time Betty's brother was asked to take the Sears catalog out to the outhouse. He didn't understand they meant to use it as toilet paper. He dumped it down the hole. Boy, did he catch it! Once when they were sheering sheep, a ram with horns kept Grandma in the outhouse until someone came with a bat to rescue her.

Betty said she had wonderful neighbors, growing up on the farm: Art Shogren, Don Shogren's father. Don's sisters used to come pick up the girls and take them to see Technicolor pictures, with stars like Esther Williams, Roy Rogers, and Gene Autry were the usual fare. Every Saturday night everyone went to town. The Shogrens lent Betty's family books like *Gone with the Wind*. It took them all summer to read it, passing it around. The Shogrens were wonderful neighbors. Theirs was a cozy home to go visit.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*They got their water from an outside pump and they used an outhouse, decorated with pictures of movie stars thumb-tacked to the wall.*

*They would knock on the door and holler, "May baskets!"*

Betty remembered celebrating May Day. Actually, she thought May baskets were for the whole month of May. They would make fudge and pick flowers, then hang the basket on someone's door. Everyone did it. They'd drive up and leave the car farther away from the building so the recipient couldn't see. Then they would knock on the door and holler, "May baskets!" Everyone would scurry to hide. When you were found, they had to catch you. Then you'd go in and have coffee and social time.

The mothers in the community celebrated birthdays together at "birthday coffees." There would be a lot of ladies in the house. About six of them went back and forth for one another's birthdays. The kids all went with their moms. Otherwise there wasn't much socializing. Since in Betty's family they couldn't afford to buy each other birthday presents, having a birthday meant being "Queen for the Day." The birthday person didn't have to do any work that day.

Betty's father lived and farmed in the Fish Lake area until the early 1950s when he sold the cows and quit farming. He went to work in Grantsburg then, for a company that manufactured wooden egg crates and snow fence. After all the five children left home, he moved to Minneapolis and worked in a machine shop that manufactured precision gears. During that time, they still spent every weekend at their home in Fish Lake. After his retirement, he and his wife moved back to the farm near Fish Lake.

In high school, Betty was a cheerleader and in choir. She was in every play. She stayed with a

friend named Marilyn in Falun when she couldn't get home. She didn't miss a thing. There were no girls' competitive sports in school. During the war they couldn't get a physical education teacher. But they did have a town softball team, with uniforms and everything. One time they played a Japanese team from the Twin Cities. Betty struck out just after her dad said, "Betty never strikes out!" She just couldn't see that ball coming across the plate. Betty still gets together with her best friends from high school.

Betty worked as a waitress at the Rainbow during high school. The Flannagans, who came to Wisconsin from Chicago, lived upstairs from the Rainbow. They invited her to stay there free on the nights she worked.

After she was married, Betty worked at the Gedney Pickle Factory in Frederick, but it was only for about four days total. She was part of the crew working on beans, but she got motion sickness from all the belts moving. Every couple of hours, she threw up. She finally asked the floor worker if there was anything not in motion. There was not, so that ended her canning career.

Roller-skating was a big thing when Betty was growing up. She couldn't afford to buy her own skates, but she rented clamp skates. Everybody came out of the rink with gray hair, stiff from the dust, but it was so much fun that Betty went two times a week. She never could learn to go backwards.

In the 1940s there was a radio program on Saturday mornings called "Let's Pretend." They

Betty walks around with her grandchildren now,  
picking up litter.

**Betty Donis Lockert Hanson** (continued)

advertised Cream of Wheat cereal. She lived for that show! But the batteries that ran the radio were low so she'd get up close with her ear and turn the radio off for ads, to be sure she could hear the end of the show.

When she was a little kid, she had a "Big Little Book." Big Little Books were thick, but with small sized pages. Her sister's was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. They read it over and over until they memorized most of the first chapter.

During World War II, the neighbor boys went into the service. Christine Shogren had a "Victory Garden." Betty never got the newspapers, but she listened to the 10:00 p.m. news every night. She went to the movies and saw newsreels too. That's how people kept up with what was going on. Betty said they were indoctrinated with prejudice against the Japanese at those newsreels. They never saw anyone but Swedes and Norwegians in the sand country.

On Saturday nights, everybody around Grantsburg went downtown, on Main Street. People who lived in town went down early to find a place to park. Betty didn't like the cowboy movies; she preferred romances, Technicolor movies on Sunday nights. Now there's a freeway to Minneapolis. You can get to the Twin Cities in an hour. Downtown Grantsburg has died.

Betty remembers once going to visit in the Twin Cities, when she was young. Her family went to her aunt and uncle's for dinner. With a nice dinner, they served a small dish of green olives, which she'd never seen before. They tried the

olives, then threw them out the window. So much for big city life, though they did enjoy walking round and round the block.

Betty feels bad about the people who junk up the neighborhood in the Fish Lake area. Her folks never had it fancy, but what they had was always kept neat. She walks around with her grandchildren now, picking up litter. A snowmobile trail goes right past their place. Betty doesn't mind snowmobiles when they stay on the trail. In fact, her boys love snowmobiling. It used to bother her mother, though, when they'd stand on the corner and go to the bathroom in plain sight, instead of going farther back in the woods.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Franklin Basna**

*Born: June 25, 1914*

FRANK MISSED HIS FIRST CHRISTMAS at home in Bayfield when he was in the hospital in Washburn during the interview in 1998. He reminisced about his house, which he moved into in 1940. He tore down the barn, board by board, and that's what he used to build the kitchen. He had a loan of \$5,000.

Chippewa in heritage, Frank told about playing lacrosse with a pine knot when he was a boy. He explained how he made lacrosse sticks too. He'd go in the woods and find a second growth white ash tree. He'd find a clear spot 7–8 feet long in the trunk, then split that clear part into quarters. He could make eight lacrosse sticks out of that. He'd hew them out with a sharp ax, then carve each with a knife so it wasn't rough. He'd leave the inner bark on when he was ready to bend the curve in the stick. The slimy inner bark would help prevent the wood from splitting. He'd put the sticks in boiling hot water. Wearing old gloves he'd bend it, out of the water, then clamp it. He'd tighten small clamps to hold the wood in a curve then let it dry before he took the bark off. Later he'd sand the stick down and put wet rawhide (from a bull's hide) on to make the net. Once he sold sixteen lacrosse sticks to a guy in Milwaukee. He made them in two weeks and sold them for \$35 each.

Using some of the same skills, Frank also made Indian cradles and dog sleighs and harnesses. Dog sleds make good transportation, he said. Pretty safe too, as a dog team won't go on the open ice.

When playing lacrosse, Frank said, "You holler at the other feller to throw the ball. If he don't you can hit him with your stick. It's a rough game." Once during a game, there was a mud puddle in front of some old ladies. A player said, "I'll fix 'em!" He made believe he slipped and splashed those ladies.

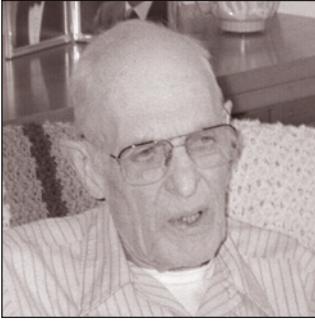
*Chippewa in heritage,  
Frank told about playing  
lacrosse with a pine knot.*

Frank remembered a pageant in 1924. It was a meeting of all the Chippewa bands. He was just nine when someone asked him if he wanted to be in the parade. They put soot on him to make him black, and he followed the queen and carried her train.

Frank went to school in Red Cliff. Upstairs from the school, there was a church. Three nuns taught at the school; one was the cook. "We had wood stoves then," Frank said.

His dad used to call square dances for the Indian settlements. Frank started calling dances at age fourteen, at the "half-breed" settlement.

Things are different for youth these days. Frank is concerned about "young people walking the streets. They don't have anything to do."



**William R. Mason**

*Born: September 8, 1923*

BILL MOVED TO THE SAND COUNTRY when he was ten years old, in 1933. His parents survived the Great Depression here. People were moving out because they couldn't pay their back taxes; some had no place to go. His family moved here because the place they were renting was sold, and they couldn't afford the good farmland. Besides, they had some friends in the area.

The house they moved into had been vacant, but some trappers had been living in the kitchen.

People had taken the windows out of the rest of the house. His grandmother just sat in the yard and cried because everything seemed so hopeless.

Bill remembers driving the horse and cutter (a sleigh for hauling people) to Randall School, a one-room schoolhouse he attended for three years. There were no school buses then. A few years later his family moved to Rush City, Minnesota, across the St. Croix River, about five miles away, so his brother could go to high school.

Besides looking up to his parents and his neighbors, Bill looked up to his schoolteacher, Tommy Jenson. "He was the best schoolteacher I ever had!" He taught at the one-room school. "You liked him, but he had discipline too." He kept the students after school until they finished their reports, but he didn't manhandle anybody. He was a young fellow, fresh out of high school, with two years of teacher training. He came out with the kids at recess. He saw that nobody made fun of other kids. At recess, the kids played a game where they divided up on each side of the schoolhouse. They'd holler and throw the

ball over the schoolhouse. When the other team got the ball, they'd run over and tag us. The team with the most players in the end won. They played hide and seek and other games too. They skated on the pond at recess. Bill looked up to all his teachers. One day Bill's boots were frozen so he "clumped" as he walked into school. He had to walk the full length of the class to get to the cloakroom. The teacher, a different one, wanted to know what was wrong with him.

People drove across the river on the ice in winter; but in summer they crossed on the Rush City Ferry. For the people who owned the ferry, it was a 24-hour-a-day job, so Bill's dad relieved them. Bill worked there too and eventually bought the ferry and ran it in the summer months. The previous owners had charged twenty-five cents, but, in the '40s, Bill charged fifty cents. For a while during the '30s, Bill worked in Chicago where he made fifty cents an hour, so it cost an hour's worth of wages to cross on the Rush City Ferry. Farmers and people from Grantsburg and Rush City were the ones who used the ferry.

At age seventeen, Bill hitchhiked to Kenosha to work on a farm. Then he went to Chicago. He was adventurous. For a while Bill farmed around Rush City, then he went to California. Then the insurance company he worked for, Beneficial Standard Life, sent him back to the Twin Cities, and he eventually came to live in rural Grantsburg. What did he like about the countryside? Old fashioned people. Besides, you don't have smog or so much congestion.



*His family moved here  
because the place they  
were renting was sold,  
and they couldn't afford  
the good farmland.*

Bill thought the war helped the economy. It brought us out of the Great Depression. At the end of World War II, Bill was in the army. He'd just finished training to invade Japan when the war ended. He went to Japan anyhow, as part of the "Occupation Forces." He ran the Officers' Sale Store there. It was a small company. He lived among the civilians in Japan for a year. But he missed being around his own family.

Bill met his wife, Eleanor Ellstrom, at the Dunham Night Club, a dance hall on the shore of a small lake several miles outside Grantsburg. All the young people went there. Eleanor was there on a date with his friend. She wanted to dance, so Bill danced with her. She said, "I wished I was going home with you instead of Leon." So he made a date with her for next time.

Bill was in the woods with his friend, Glen Johnson, when Glen died. There was a lot of snow that year, 1997. Bill was going to clear out the road with the pickup. Bill got the pickup warmed up. Glen got in the same pickup so they wouldn't risk two trucks getting stuck. Glen just slumped over. Bill thought he was looking for something under the dash. Then Bill picked him up, and he just fell down again. Bill hollered at Glen, then turned and headed for the emergency room four and a half miles away in the Village of Grantsburg. A snowplow was holding up traffic, so Bill had to drive more slowly than he wanted. Staff at the emergency room came out fast with a stretcher and worked on him right away, but Glen was gone.



**Lowell Donald  
Hoffman**

*Born: October 26, 1917*

IT WAS 1952 WHEN LOWELL GOT married and bought the place he lives in now, in Grantsburg, but he first came to the area when he was only five months old, in 1918. He grew up in the country, with three older sisters, one younger sister, and three brothers. They had no electricity then, though they did have a car. To play, they rolled tires or a hoop. The hoop was propelled by a stick and a cross-piece on the lower end. They got a lot of exercise. Lowell remembers one tree that was coming up from the ground at a 45-degree angle. He used to run up that tree trunk. The higher he could run up, the farther he could jump down. His sister saw a stump in the pasture. A tree had fallen and left a splinter from the stump. His sister thought that was a chimney. Lowell also remembers an old, dilapidated stairway outside the house. The floor was rickety, and he wasn't supposed to be there. But his sister was making mud pies. She put them on the porch railing, presumably to dry. He leaned on the rail and fell 12 feet. He landed on his hands and knees, unhurt. His sister ran downstairs to tell what had happened. At that, his mom put down the apple she was peeling and met him as he came walking through the front door. The upper door was nailed shut and the outside staircase removed after that incident. Among his boyhood memories, Lowell remembers school best. In third grade, they had a toy band. He was bandleader. They gave him a drumstick to lead. He played baseball a lot. When they wore out the old ball, they just put tape on it. When he played hockey, he used a tree branch. He had no hockey stick.

Hyles Hayman was Lowell's closest friend when he was a kid. "He's the one who shot me." He was carrying a BB gun and shot Lowell in the rear end. Hyles shot himself to try to show it didn't hurt.

After eight years at the two-room elementary school, Lowell graduated from Grantsburg High School in 1936. He spent a lot of time in the sand country during those high school years. He and his friends took 22 rifles to Big Mound. They could see the Rush City water tower from there. Today it's all chewed up from motorcycles, but it was a grassy plain with brush then. They called it "Indian Mound," but it wasn't really an Indian Mound, Lowell explained. And they didn't shoot anything there either. They just carried their rifles. They liked to go swimming in the Wood River too. There were brush prairie and scrub oaks in the places he used to play and swim. He used to walk three or four miles, just to have fun.

One day the circus came to the fair grounds. Lowell's dad gave him money to go to the circus and buy an ice cream cone. But Lowell didn't know about the sideshow, and he gave the sideshow man all his money. He just got an ice cream cone and walked home. He couldn't get into the main circus. He never told his dad.

When Lowell was in school, he liked to go to the Branstad Store to get a pad of paper or other school supplies. It was a great store, but it burned a few years ago. Branstad is a community about two and a half miles south of Grantsburg. Ole Branstad was a Civil War veteran who spent time in Andersonville Prison. Once there was a blacksmith, a feed mill, and a tavern in the town. Now

there's no business in Branstad except a print shop. People ran the tavern out of town in 1933. Apparently they had a federal but not a local license or something, so the opposition got enough signers on a petition to close them down.

More recently, Lowell learned about the first settlement in the area. It was called Hickersonville. They found the foundation there just a couple of years ago. Another piece of history Lowell talked about was the tote roads, the old roads used for wagons carrying loads. A schoolteacher, Clayton Jorgenson, wrote a compilation of the tote roads. In 1870, the first town road was laid out there. It was connected with the old tote road.

Lowell said he feels sad about the changes that have come to the sand country over the years. People don't have the same camaraderie they used to share. There used to be a big crew that came for threshing, and everyone got together for great meals. They used to have a party telephone too. A long, steady ring meant an emergency, and everybody picked up the phone to listen and help if needed. Now Lowell says he doesn't know his neighbors. Not knowing your neighbors would have been unheard of when he was growing up. He doesn't know anybody on Main Street any more.

He remembered a hired man, John Harness, who lived with his family. John was penniless, with no place to stay, when Lowell's dad met him in town. So he stayed at Lowell's house. He slept in an unheated room. He worked there six weeks, then he was gone.

Grantsburg was Norwegian territory; Trade Lake was Swedish. Lowell remembered that some

*They had no electricity then, though they did have a car.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*The old roads used for wagons carrying loads were called tote roads.*

German people came to live in the area during World War II. People in the U.S. were leery of Germans then. But the man was a salesman, and he came to Lowell's house. Lowell told the others, "They're going to be all right." Lowell and the man, Guttorm (Tom) Halverson, became friends. Halverson sold kerosene lanterns, coffee, patent medicines—he was a house-to-house salesman.



**Nina May Coos Wicklund**

*Born: March 3, 1919*

**Betty Irene Coos Magnuson**

*Born: October 6, 1920*

WHEN THEY WERE GROWING UP, NINA and her sister Betty had different interests. While Nina was playing softball, or kitten ball as they called it, Betty preferred to play with kittens, not balls. Girls couldn't play in competitive games, but in school, Nina played ball with the boys. Nina didn't play with dolls, but Betty did. She had dolls with cloth bodies. Their brother threw the dolls around. Outside, the girls made mud pies. Though they rarely ate real bananas, they sliced cornstalks for bananas with their mud pies. In the winter, Nina threw snowballs when the snow was melty. One time she stole out of school without permission. She went to a neighbor's to see a baby. She was late and had to stay after school to compensate.

*In the 1930s,  
their sister Lois had polio.  
They called it  
"infant paralysis" then.*

Betty has never stolen anything except once. She stole an index card. A girlfriend dared Nina to steal an orange once, but then she left it in her dresser until it was so hard she couldn't eat it. Betty remembered getting an apple in the bottom of her Christmas stocking.

During the Great Depression, their mother, Jessie Barrett Coos, had a way of doing things so they didn't feel the hard times. For a treat, she

poured thick cream and coffee and sugar on a piece of bread.

Betty and Nina pointed out that there are a lot of children's graves in the cemetery from the flu of 1918, though that was before they were born. When there was a diphtheria epidemic in the Eckdahl area, and the kids all got sick at the same time, they kept the sick ones in the living room. They were so contagious that, when someone died, they passed the bodies out the window rather than through the rest of the house. Betty and Nina's family had another illness to deal with. In the 1930s, their sister, Lois, had polio. They called polio "infant paralysis" then. Lois had physical therapy.

Nina and Betty both married in the 1940s. Nina met her husband at a dance. They danced the



*Nina planned to go hunting the morning after the interview.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



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waltz, two-step, and polka. Their parents played violin so they played the music for the dances. Nina said her husband didn't get on his knee when he proposed. Betty said she encouraged Ernest, her husband. She wrapped butter, and he hauled cream for the creamery. They must have gotten to know each other through work.

Nina did housework in the Twin Cities during the 1940s. She made \$2.50 a week, plus room and board. In those days, you could see a show for thirty-five cents or have a banana split at Bridgeman's for twenty-five cents.

Nina had cancer in 1948. She had a hysterectomy. It was soon after that, in the 1950s that her world really fell apart. Her husband, Russell Wicklund, died. He had cancer of the kidney. Her husband's sister-in-law died of cancer of the

lungs, so, as a single parent, Nina raised her nephew, Roger, from the time he was nine.

Betty had two children during the '50s: Nancy and Allen. Her husband farmed, but she never learned to drive a tractor. She worked at the Alpha Store. That helped. At the Alpha Store, Betty was supposed to put the file box with charge cards in alphabetical order instead of the frequency of use sequence that worked for her. Betty said "they thought we followed orders, but we didn't." Betty enjoyed working there.

In the 1960s, Nina worked at North States Industries, a little factory in Falun. The factory made juvenile furniture. Nina worked there until she retired. Now she baby sits a toddler four days a week.



**Catherine Jones Strharsky**

*Born: October 6, 1922*

**Joseph Strharsky**

*Born: August 14, 1923*

AFTER THEIR KIDS GREW UP, KATIE AND Joe moved to their current house in Iron River in 1982, where many of the people they grew up with also live. Joe said, “During the Depression, we all moved to the cities.” “In 1964,” Katie said, “we moved here from Chicago.” They had a daughter with rheumatoid arthritis so they were told to move west where it was hot and dry. But it turned out to be rheumatic fever, so instead of moving to California, they stayed right here in Wisconsin. Joe worked in construction, so he could live anywhere and still have work. He built some of those big buildings in Chicago. Katie said her “home roots” go deep, and she has siblings in the area. “Living in the city, we hardly knew our next door neighbors, but here we can call on friends if anything happens.” With five kids, and drugs coming into the schools, they thought northern Wisconsin would be safer than a big city. Of course, “now there are problems in Iron River too.”

Katie’s memories of growing up were not all that pleasant. One of twelve children, she washed clothes on a board. There was no running water, and there were lots of diapers. Her mom always seemed to be pregnant. Her mom was jolly, and her dad was loving, and they weren’t exactly poor, but they just didn’t have money. During the Great Depression, they raised everything and stored vegetables in the root cellar. Everything was mortgaged, even the cattle. When a calf was born, it automatically became part of the mortgage. But Katie said her dad would sneak a calf and kill it sometimes. If a neighbor butchered a cow or pig, they divided it among the neighbors because there was no refrigeration. In the winter

you could put it out to freeze. They smoked a lot of meat too. Katie’s mom made dresses and other clothes, sheets, and curtains from beautiful colored feedbags. It was comfortable fabric. Katie’s dad was foreman of the WPA (Works Progress Administration). His back gave out from working in the mines. When the social worker came to the house and saw so many children, she brought boxes of food. Katie’s mom was refusing it. Once a month someone brought food and checked how everybody felt. One time the social worker came when everybody had a sore throat. They had to go to a doctor in Washburn, and three of the kids had to have their tonsils removed.

Katie walked to school, carrying the same sandwich every day. She carried milk in a pint whiskey bottle, but you couldn’t do that in winter. She walked three miles, and the milk would freeze. Sometimes it was so cold that her feet would freeze to her boots. Her mom would cry with her and put her feet up by the stove. She and her sister took turns going to school and helping at home. It was a one-room school in Eileen, Wisconsin. Nobody went to high school; you couldn’t get there.

Katie worked in Chicago during 1940–42. Her oldest sister was a nun at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Chicago, and she sent Katie a bus ticket to come and work there, so as to help the folks with some cash. Katie remembered a prank one time when she was working there. With the nuns, she slept in a big room with six beds in it. They were hospital beds. One night one of the sisters gave them some wine. It was just a little bit, she said,

*"It's not just a dead piece of land any more."  
A lot of people come hiking through the barrens.*

but she "passed out." The others wound both sides of the bed up. She was lying cross-wise in the bed, with her feet sticking out, like a hot dog in a bun. When she woke up, she started to scream, and the Mother Superior came in.

In 1941, the Rural Electric Association (REA) came through. Before that, people in the area just used kerosene lamps. Three or four years after that, telephones came in with a six-party line.

Everybody listened in. When Joe and Katie moved back from Chicago, and Joe was remodeling the windows in their current house, they had a three-party phone line. This was around 1965 or '66. A neighbor told Katie, "Your windows came in today." She must have heard it on the party line. Another time, a party-line neighbor offered to go get Katie's kids from school when they called about missing the bus. Everybody knew what was going on in your life, and they helped you if they could.

Katie and Joe met each other because Joe's brother, Bill, was going with Katie's sister, Millie. On Sunday night, he would pick her up. Katie wasn't going out because she had broken up with her boyfriend. Joe's brother told Katie that Joe told him to "bring a girl for me too." In retrospect, Joe claims he was only kidding, but Katie went. When Katie first saw Joe, he was standing with a bottle of beer in each hand. They were going dancing in Avalon, and Katie told him he had to leave the beer there. After that night, Joe wrote to his former girlfriend saying "I met this girl, and I'm going to marry her." Joe's brother married Katie's sister too, and both couples have stayed married more than 50 years now.

Meanwhile, Katie had chosen Joe before they even met one another. Katie's friend from Milwaukee had a photomat picture of Joe, which Katie took and refused to give back, saying "Maybe some day I'll marry him!" She put Joe's picture in the frame next to her boyfriend's. Her mother turned over the picture when the boyfriend came to visit. Joe and Katie lived 12 miles apart then. That was a long way, as they didn't have cars, just a horse and buggy.

Since Joe and Katie were young, people have put in some better roads through the barrens, fire roads. There are restrictions where people used to dump garbage. And they've made places you can camp, even with horses. You can camp for a week if you want to. "Our neighbors do it." The lakes in the sand country seem to collect campgrounds around them. "They've done a lot with the barrens. You don't have all those dead trees," Katie said. "They've made a snowmobile trail," Joe added. "It's not lonesome in there [the barrens] now; there are a lot of people." They come in the winter, not just the summer. There is a corridor for bikes and four-wheelers. The snowmobile clubs maintain the corridor, but the ATVs rip it up in the summer. You can go from Ashland to Superior on a snowmobile now. People enjoy the barrens, but in a different way than they used to. People ride horses here. "It's not just a dead piece of land any more." A lot of people come hiking through the barrens. They shouldn't throw garbage there, but they do. "We're lucky to be living close to wide open spaces. It frightens me to be living in Chicago.... There is history in this country."



**Marjorie Martell Tutor**

*Born: January 15, 1912*

MARGIE LIVED IN THE CLAY COUNTRY outside of Iron River most of her life, in the Township of Tripp. She remembered the visitors her family had: neighbors came, and there were traveling ministers coming to conduct services at the schoolhouse. There was a picnic once a year for the whole town. Ladies of the Women's Independent Workers' Club made little needle-work things for the soldiers in the war. People made oyster stews and held suppers; Margie went with her parents. They also gave money to the Red Cross and sent boxes of cookies to the soldiers. Margie had a jolly, red-headed uncle who was a World War I veteran. He always took the biggest piece of cake at these social events. So Mrs. Tripp, who started the township along with her husband, sent a piece of cake especially for him. It was stuffed with cotton to teach him about his greed. In 1921, that uncle was killed by a gunman in Wisconsin.

Margie remembers some details of the log house of her childhood, the kitchen and water pitchers. She remembers the day her mother died. Only two years old, Marjorie was sent to a neighbor's. She rode on a three-seated buggy with a fringe on the way to the funeral. The funeral was outside. A lady played the organ, and there were wooden, folding chairs. As they were lowering the casket into the grave, the casket tipped, so they brought it up and opened it so the kids could see their mother one more time. She wonders what they buried with her. Her mother "hemorrhaged" to death. Years later, from a letter from her aunt, she learned that her mother had been pregnant. Her aunt asked about the baby.

Neither she nor her siblings knew anything about any baby, so she presumed it died. When Marjorie's own first child was born, she needed someone to help her take care of the baby, but her stepmother didn't know what to do, so her stepmother's mother came to help. Marjorie goes back to the sand country every year to visit the cemetery where her mother is buried, near the Chequamegon National Forest.

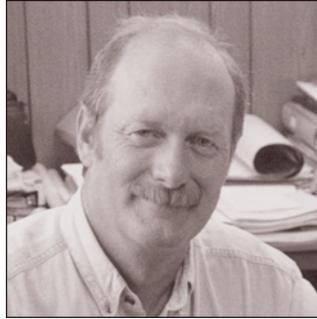
There was a man named Getch who helped build houses for people. She thought he was a hero when she was a girl. Later, her husband built two houses.

Marjorie's husband was eleven years older than she was. He was a veteran of both World Wars I and II. He'd been a carpenter in the service, so he knew how to work with lumber. She met him when he came to stay at her uncle's. He was helping her uncle build a house. Marjorie married him



*Margie showed me some of her crocheting projects.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Steven C. Coffin**

*Born: October 7, 1950*

when she was still a teen of 16 or 17. He was a surveyor and timber cruiser for Bayfield County. “He could draw a perfect map,” she said.

Margie worked in a cannery in Iron River, where they made chop suey in the late 1940s, after World War II. Women didn’t get the same wage men did, though they did the same work. At the cannery they raised bean sprouts in big tanks. They canned green beans too. Margie worked the label machine. Before that, she worked in the line, putting labeled cans into stenciled boxes. She’d do whatever needed doing: trim celery, put cans in cooking kettle racks, etc. One day it was so hot that she almost fell in the kettle. She passed out and they sent her home. She remembered lying on the lumber pile when her husband came to get her. She stayed home for a week. She also made coffee for coffee breaks. She took her old three-burner kerosene stove to the cannery and a big white enamel pot full of water. She’d get the water boiling and stir in some coffee grounds, then shut it off. The coffee would cook just from the heat in it and “the girls would bring cake for their break.” People paid five cents a day for their coffee, and the money went to buy coffee cups or day old rolls. One of the perks of working at the cannery was that they could have any cans that were dented. Initially Charlie Willoughby ran the cannery, but then he sold it to a fellow named Gino.

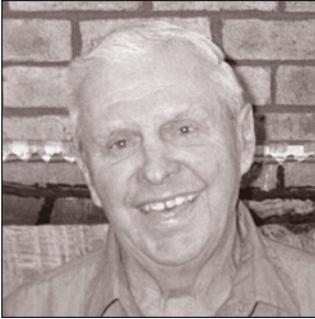
Marjorie said she walked 18 miles round trip to Iron River to get things she needed. She carried the groceries on her back. Sometimes she could give the mailman fifteen cents to ride with him, or she could call in and he’d deliver the groceries to her.

STEVE WORKS FOR MOSINEE PAPER IN Solon Springs. He pointed out the importance of timber management in the area as an economic factor. People earn their livings through timber. There are four people directly employed by Mosinee in Steve’s office. Four major logging contractors that work with Mosinee employ about ten people. Independent loggers depend on the resource for their income too. People who work on the railroad and the truckers who haul the lumber should be counted too. Steve said jobs in logging are full-time, family-supporting jobs, whereas tourism jobs are only minimum wage or part-time.

*Steve pointed out the importance of timber management in the area as an economic factor.*

When Steve thinks of people who had a big impact on the land in the northwest sands, he thinks of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). CCC workers turned a lot of open land—thousands of acres—into forests in a short time.

During Prohibition years there was a lot of moonshine made in the barrens. In the low areas or depressions, you can find broken crockery, telltale shards remaining from the work of making moonshine from sugar. It was rot-gut alcohol, about 180 proof.



**Russell Lester Connor**

*Born: March 1, 1923*

LIKE HIS SECOND COUSIN, GENE Connor, Russ has Chippewa heritage. He was running a gas station in Webster at the time of the interview.

Russ made comments about the roads. They were sandy and few when he was young, and the sand country seemed pretty remote. Rooky Road was built by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) boys, but the road wasn't there when Russ was a young boy. Once Russ remembered his dad driving the Model T up a sandy road that went up a steep hill. It was dark, about 9:30 p.m. They came upon a big touring car, a La Salle, stuck with wheels half-buried in the sand. Russ' dad intended to go around the car, but the road was narrow, and he couldn't without risk of getting stuck in the sand himself. So he had to stop. Just then one guy jumped on the running board and poked a pistol in Russ' dad's face. "Get out of the car, Buddy." There was a guy on the other running board too. They were all very upset inside the car. There was an Illinois license plate on the stuck vehicle. Russ' dad thought fast and told the gunman that he knew a one-legged bootlegger who ran whiskey from Canada to Chicago during Prohibition and was therefore known to the gangsters. He was telling them that the bootlegger would not be pleased with them if they took his car. But the brakes in the Model T were not good, and the car began to roll backwards, interrupting the stalemate. The guys with guns jumped off as the car rolled back. The car rolled down the hill and backed into the brush. Russ' father turned the car around and drove

across the bridge and away. As the car was crossing the bridge, young Russell, in the back seat, was terrified a bullet would come through the back of the car. After that, they were afraid to travel around much in the remote areas in 1934.

Webster had a connection to the Ma Barker gang. Ma Barker had a boyfriend who was a drinker. Her sons were leery of the drinking, talkative boyfriend. They thought he might slip the wrong word to the wrong person. Halfway between Webster and Danbury, by Fremstad Lake, the sons shot the old guy. They shot him five times in the chest and tried to cut his mustache off. They hauled him out to the lake. But the first guy driving by in a car saw the pearly white body in the mud. Charlie Saunders, the sheriff with a handlebar mustache, and Raymond Swedberg, the mortician who is Russ' neighbor, went out there to the body. Ray waded out in the "sea of soup." They'd shot the boyfriend lying face down. Charlie said: "Amateurs!"

Gangsters hung out in the barrens because it was so remote. Highway 35 was a gravel road then. There were just "snake trails"—two-rut roads. There were no telephones. License plates weren't necessarily linked to anything so it was hard to trace a car.

Now there are "lots of useless roads" left behind after logging operations. This is Russ' pet peeve. Millions of miles of these roads left behind leave the land open for weekend campers, snowmobilers, and other recreation-seekers. With this influx of humanity, this population explosion that



*Russ still runs Connor's gas station in Webster. You can buy wild rice there as well as auto fuel.*



PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

over-clutters the lakeshores, he thinks we shouldn't make things too convenient for the human race. More than half our nation is overweight. People should walk down to the lake, not drive down and dump their boats in the water. He thinks we should restore the land for wildlife rather than leaving all these useless roads. Russ has operated the filling station in Webster for 60 years. He had to pay money to help clean up the environment because he operates the gas station. With this in mind, he has no sympathy for loggers who should clean up their leftover roads after a logging operation.

Russ' dad started the gas station in 1940, when he couldn't borrow a nickel from any bank. The Great Depression was fierce. The terrible heat and terrible drought contributed to the hard times. His dad borrowed \$350 from his brother, who inherited the family farm. He carried mail and had a little money.

World War I ended before he was born, but Russ remembered hearing a story about it. Dewey Connor, Lafayette's brother, was picking potatoes when he heard the Soo Line train coming—its whistle was blowing and blowing. The engineer was blowing the whistle because World War I was over.

Russ served overseas in the service for three years. He spent two and a half years in Hawaii at the end of World War II. He could have stayed in Hawaii, and he made more money in the army, but he wanted to get back to the rivers and lakes, the hunting and fishing, the freedom of coming and going. He didn't like the confinement of the Army. And he was eager to see American women.

Russ' grandfather, William Connor, was born in a wigwam in Connor's Point up by Duluth/Superior in the mid-1800s. With seven children, his grandfather's family moved away from that wigwam so the children could get educated. They went to Star Prairie, and the kids learned reading, writing, penmanship, geography, and calculations. William Connor and his brother Darius, Lafayette's father, both became well-respected surveyors who were known for keeping marvelous notes. They laid out the corners in Burnett County. Russ was told by Kathy Swengel, a current surveyor, that Darius and William were very accurate, even compared with survey work using today's modern equipment. William and Darius both played the fiddle; Russ has his grandfather's fiddle on the wall.

Russ has an arrowhead collection given to him by Fred Mowden. Mowden came to the Webster area

**Russell Lester Connor** *(continued)*

in the summers, from Illinois, near Stand Rock, where Chief Shabonee and his people were held in siege. Six bushels of arrowheads were found there when the place was plowed. The arrowheads came from Illinois. Russ explained that sometimes a hunter or warrior would put rattlesnake poison on some arrowheads. They did this by getting the snake to bite a deer's bloody lung. Some arrowheads were made without tails. These were war arrows, designed to stay in the wound when the shaft of the arrow was pulled out. There were also stunning arrows that were designed to stun a bird or rabbit.

Russ referred to an ancestor, Andrew Connor, who was wounded in the Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia, during the Civil War. He was left for dead. A couple of days later, Union soldiers came to pick up the dead and found him. He'd been shot through the hip at close range. The doctor ran a ramrod straight through the wound to clean it. When the wounded man came to, he saw a dead man next to him, a Confederate soldier. At the same time, he noticed that his own wound was bandaged. Andrew believed the Confederate soldier bandaged him before he, the Confederate, died of his own wounds. Lafayette Connor shared the same story with me, as it is a cherished family remembrance.

The Connor boys were men from Pennsylvania. They left the East because they got a couple of girls in trouble, and they came to Wisconsin. They met two Indian women, daughters of a chief, at the Trading Post in Duluth. Each of these boys married one of the Chippewa women,



PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Russ has an arrowhead collection that came from Illinois, but he values it along with his own Indian heritage.*

and that's how the Connors got started in the northwest part of Wisconsin.

Now Russ runs a filling station. He said that, when you run a gas station, some old guy always almost moves in with you. It's part of the community. When the full service station faded away, Russ thinks we went in the wrong direction. His dad used to say that whenever a young man got into trouble, there were not enough cows to milk. "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." The gas station is a way to work into the community. "You see 'em all."

Russ insists that human beings are not much different than we were a few hundred years ago. He thought he had been born into a Utopia. But it just isn't that way. The same world has given us Hitler, Mussolini, and Saddam Hussein.

**Eugene Connor**

*Born: July 25, 1928*

*There used to be more  
of a community, more like family.*

LAFAYETTE CONNOR'S SON, GENE, worked as a resource person to the elders at the St. Croix Band Tribal Center in Hertel, Wisconsin. He had recently returned from a trip in which he accompanied relay runners in support of treaty rights to Washington, DC. He said he drank bottled water all the way; he was afraid to drink the local water as he traveled.

Gene gave this as an example of “the disconnect” between people and the natural world and an illustration of how poorly we have cared for the land and water. “Would you like to have every hair on your head managed? The grass grows, the trees grow—what else is there? There is arrogance in management.”

“We manage by facilitators. You need a facilitator in any kind of Indian business. We’re not a treaty tribe; we’re bands who live along the St. Croix River and its tributaries. People were being thrown out of their homes when the land was being purchased by somebody.” In Danbury, for example, Indian people were already living there, but not acknowledged as the landowners, they were essentially “squatters on their own land.” It

wasn’t like a reservation, where people were collected together and moved there. In the 1854 Treaty, different bands in Wisconsin were allotted separate treaties. There were many bands, but the treaty drew people into an area to take advantage of the treaty. The St. Croix Band never did go to Lac Courte Oreilles to participate in the treaty—they remained “squatters on their own land.”

Although Gene lived in Chicago when he was growing up, he spent his summers in the barrens. He notices a difference now from the way it used to be. There used to be more of a community, more like family. Once he heard a Webster man fume, “I’ve lived here twenty years, and I’m still an outsider!” The locals just don’t seem to embrace a new person.

During the war, in 1946, Gene was an Ambassador of Good Will in Germany. He had a non-combatative role. He traveled in Korea, Japan, Alaska, and Puerto Rico. One day he couldn’t answer the question “What are you doing here?” so, instead of re-enlisting, he came back home to his grandfather’s farm outside of Webster.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Alexander (Ike)  
Louis Gokee**

*Born: December 29, 1918*

IKE SAID HE USED TO DRINK BEER AND get drunk and raise hell when he was young. He got thrown in jail for drinking and raising hell, for fighting mostly. He quit drinking in 1956 and quit smoking in 1964. He quit drinking when his wife said he had to quit drinking or she and the kids would be gone. He quit smoking when he was working on his power saw, with it apart, and he lit three cigarettes, one right after the other, without noticing. That convinced him to quit. He had fourteen kids, but five passed away. All but one of his kids smokes, he said.

Growing up Chippewa meant hard times when Ike was young. He went to bed hungry quite a few nights. He was from a large family. His dad drank too much. Many times Ike hid under the bed, if he couldn't get out of the house. He'd shake and tremble. He was really scared. If his dad caught him, he'd get a good pounding. If he could get out of the house in time, he'd go to his sister's house or something. There was always some place to go.

In June 1944, Ike was drafted into the army, even though he had four children. He left the states in December and was sent to Germany. On ship-board, he stayed anchored outside of Liverpool for days, then rode on the troop train all day, then loaded on a boat to Le Havre, France. In France, he saw broken concrete and twisted irons, evidence of war. The Germans had coffee cans with gas you could light and warm your hands over. Ike said they took over that idea pretty promptly!

Ike spent nine days in the front line in snow a foot deep, right out in the open. He was supposed to deliver overhead fire to attack a town in

*In the 1950s his wife ran  
Gokee's Restaurant.*

Luxembourg, but he got sick with bronchitis, laryngitis, and pretty near pneumonia. When he reported to go on sick call, he put "Cold" on the paper, but they put a thermometer in his mouth and carried him to the hospital on a stretcher. The rest of his unit crossed the Rhine and got all shot up. Whoever rescued the wounded took them to an island in the Rhine. Nobody knew he was in the hospital already, so they sent his parents a telegram saying he was dead. He wrote from the hospital and let them know he was all right. He stayed in the hospital 30 days, then went back to the fighting. Later, his sons were all in the service until they got tired of it.

Ike married twice. His first wife and he had known each other since they were kids. He now says, "She made a mistake by marrying me." He says that because he was wild. His second wife was younger. Both wives lived in the area.

In the 1950s his wife ran Gokee's Restaurant. They sold hot dogs and hamburgers, ice cream, and pop. Customers could order food from waitresses outside or inside, sitting at a booth. They had the restaurant about four years but had to give it up. It was too much work. They couldn't get any sleep at night because people would stay all night. They even had a jukebox. Soon there was another restaurant across the street, but they were already closing Gokee's.



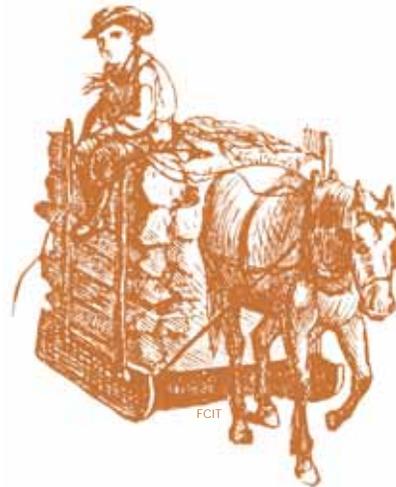
**Francis Lampella**

*Born: December 2, 1919*

FRANCIS SAID HIS FOLKS SETTLED IN Washburn in 1906, when they came from Minnesota to the Finnish settlement begun just a few years before. The first thing Finnish people usually built was a sauna, and everybody planted a grove of apple trees.

When he was a boy, the Gibson School was nearby until the schools consolidated and moved that schoolhouse with a team of horses to make a hay barn. He went through eighth grade.

His dad worked in lumber camps in the winter, on the farm in summer. Francis worked planting trees in the late 1940s. He ran a sawmill during the '40s too. He went to Illinois and worked at a U.S. Steel factory. In Ashland he worked making veneer for the Splicewood Corporation, until that closed down. He worked for the Nekoosa Company for about nine years, logging in Bayfield County, loading train gondolas by hand, and taking lumber to the paper mills.



*His dad worked in lumber camps in the winter, on the farm in summer.*

Francis' four brothers were in the service. Three served in Europe. One joined the paratroopers and participated in D-Day efforts. One liberated France in a jeep. A jeep ahead of him hit a mine—death was that close. Francis' slip from the military recruiters said "Rejected." He was rejected for having TB. His mother said she prayed to God to "leave me at least one son." He went to a sanitarium, where x-rays revealed he did not have tuberculosis. "It was just a plain miracle! Never underestimate the power of a woman's prayer." He didn't have TB, but he just had to rest over by Bayfield for a while. In 1944, Francis' dad saw the telegrapher coming. His son had been killed in action. With his brother killed in action, Francis said he would not have had to go to war anyway. It was after this that he started cutting wood.



SUSAN GILCHRIST



**Joyce Zifco**

*Born: October 27, 1953*

JOYCE WAS RAISED ON A SUBSISTENCE farm near Ashland, in a family of twelve kids. With so many children, it's no surprise that the Zifcos were known for putting together baseball and football teams. She played outside a lot, but she worked hard too, milking cows and plucking chickens. Her bike was her transportation. Joyce always liked the outdoors, playing among the ferns and in the pine plantations.

Joyce says things have changed a lot now. In 1993 and 1994, her folks died and the farm was sold. Her nieces and nephews are growing up with a different lifestyle. They don't have farms to grow up on, and the same responsibilities just aren't there. The kids live at a faster pace, looking at things like cars and money when they are only twelve years old. But there is still a good quality of life; it's just different.

Joyce is personally and professionally concerned with the way people use resources today. She has spent much of her career fighting fires, yet she sees that if people want the place to stay the same, they will need a prescribed burn program. She said, "We're okay as land managers," but she's not so sure we're as well equipped to manage crowds

of people. She would like to see the state, federal, and county governments look at the area as one big land base. She says the people there assume everybody is the DNR. She's talked to ATVers intensively about that, and they get mixed messages from the different agencies.

ATVers think they've found the magical place they want to ride. But an ATV can quickly devastate an area of the sandy soils. ATVs climbing on the hills leads to trenching ditches and erosion. Then heavy rains wash out more soil and vegetation. The public isn't informed on the resource damage that's done.

Joyce appreciates the diversity of nature and she wants to see the natural resources of the barrens protected from ATVs and exotic plants. She believes that federal, state, and county staff should do more networking to standardize regulations and deliver consistent messages to the public. "We can pass the resource on to future generations if we're careful how the public uses it."

Joyce says it's Lake Superior that keeps bringing her back to the area. But she also appreciates people's values in the area. "Down home standards are still here," she said.



SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Lake Superior, the freshwater sea, is the largest freshwater lake in the world by surface area, third by volume. It is a powerful draw to the area.*

*An ATV can cause erosion that quickly devastates a place with sandy soil.*



DNR ARCHIVE

**Floyd Lang**

*Born: April 6, 1914*

**Mariam Esther Lebeck Lang**

*Born: July 23, 1921*

IN A GROUP DISCUSSION, FLOYD LANG remembered a community picnic on his family's farm in Milaca, Minnesota, around 1925 when he was about eight years old. There was an ice cream stand on one end of the picnic grounds. Older men paid him to run and get an ice cream cone. He made \$2 that day.

Floyd remembered Paul Olson. Paul had a threshing machine and came with the crew to thresh the oats. Paul would walk home down Loggin Creek. In the winter, his wife would card wool and spin and knit mittens. Paul would wear a pair out every day just handling jack pine wood in winter.

Floyd said the community always came together to help each other until recently. They went together to help each farmer thresh. It wasn't always equal, but no money changed hands. They shared the cost of the machine together too.

He remembered free movie night every Saturday night until 1936. It started in the mid-1920s. Before 1928, they were all silent movies. Floyd's wife, Mariam Lang, remembered the popcorn at the free Saturday night movies.



*In the winter, Paul Olson's wife would card wool and spin and knit mittens.*

FCIT

Mariam also remembered when her brother was born at home. Her grandma came. She was only three and a half, but she remembers that her grandma took her upstairs.

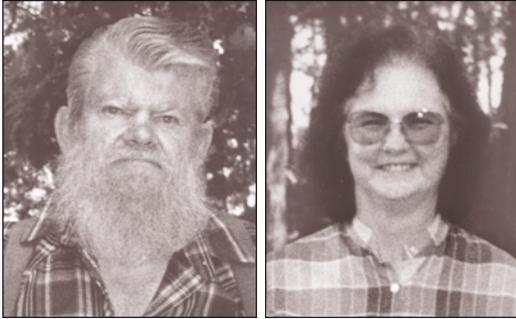
Mariam spent her first years near Grantsburg, but moved to Minnesota in the fall of 1927. She returned in 1934 and has lived in Grantsburg ever since—fifty-seven years on the same farm (as of 2003).

Mariam felt the effects of World War II, when she and Floyd couldn't go on a honeymoon. They didn't have gasoline or tires for driving. They had to have stamps for things they bought. Stamps were required for coffee. You couldn't buy sheets or bedding and you couldn't get nylon stockings. Because it was an unusual occurrence, she remembers that an airplane landed in their field once on the farm where they live now, by Grantsburg. The plane had run out of gas. The pilot was a young fellow from St. Paul.



FCIT

*The community always came together to help each other until recently. They went together to help each farmer thresh.*



**Milton Herman Aronson**

*Born: December 29, 1939*

**Eleanor Bistram Aronson**

*Born: November 10, 1942*

MILT SAID THAT IN HIS BACKGROUND, a Swede married a Norwegian, which was unusual in that Swedes and Norwegians weren't historically compatible. He claims to be Norwegian. He says that Norwegians poke fun at themselves, and he likes their sense of humor.

Milt first lived in the Northwest Sands Area at age fifteen. He remembers always having to watch what kind of shoes he bought, so as not to track so much sand in the house. Milt and Eleanor live in Grantsburg. One of the reasons Milt is so attached to the sand country is because that's where he met Eleanor, his "soul mate." He was seventeen; she was fourteen. She was the sister of one of his buddies and his first girlfriend.

Eleanor got to know Milt because she went to school with his sisters. One time she saw him downtown and asked him if his sisters were in town. The two of them ended up just walking up and down the street all evening. About two weeks later, he asked her to go out with him. They were teens in the 1950s. There was no "show hall" in town, so they went to Frederick to the movies and then drove around the country roads for their outings.

They each lived about five miles from town in opposite directions, so it was a ten-mile walk each way to see one another. In the winter, he skied cross-country to go see her. On Christmas one year, Eleanor invited him over. He went there only to find nobody home. He split some firewood and headed home. About two thirds of the way home, his foot twisted out of the ski, and he went down, spraining his ankle. He never let her forget that.

Eleanor said she just always liked the land in the Northwest Sands Area. She likes a quiet, uncomplicated life. When she was a girl, she went to the Twin Cities and couldn't wait to get back to the sand country. Looking at those tall skyscrapers, she couldn't believe anyone could build anything that high! Her mom said, "Stop staring! People will know you're from the country."

*Milt remembers watching  
what kind of shoes he bought,  
so as not to track sand  
into the house.*

Their house was broken into several years ago. Milt was working nights then, and Eleanor was taking her kids up the river to swim, and she didn't lock the house. Somebody broke in and stole her wallet out of her purse. The thief stabbed the dog with a knife. It must have been a troubled person, because the dog was friendly. Since then they lock their doors.

Milt doesn't like all the people moving into the area. If you could stop the population movement, he said, it would be better for the future and for people, and for nature to be nature. "When we get people all over the place it's not natural any more." Still, Milt wouldn't trade the sand country for clay or oceanfront.



**Michael Newago**

*Born: November 2, 1918*

**Kathryn Munson**

*Born: May 29, 1919*

TALKING WITH KATHRYN MUNSON on the Red Cliff Reservation, Mike remembered hauling pulpwood at the Dupont plant. He did a lot of hauling popple. He loaded it on trucks. They used it for the sawmill. Kathryn mentioned that the Dupont plant used to burn the blueberry leaves. She didn't remember any other fires in the area except when Dupont had burns. The plant made gunpowder. They had guards there. Between Ashland and Washburn, the plant employed a lot of people in the area. In the 1960s they moved the plant to Delaware.



*A New Year's tradition was baking. Everyone baked so they had something to give everyone else.*

Kathryn remembered a New Year's tradition they used to have. Everyone baked so they had something to give everyone else. You'd have a big kettle of soup or a small glass of wine to offer. Then you'd go from house to house wishing everyone a good New Year.



PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

## Ardell Lowell Anderson

*Born: January 22, 1935*

ARDELL ANDERSON ALSO PARTICIPATED in a group discussion with Floyd and Mariam Lang at the Burnett County Historical Society building in Grantsburg.

Ardell said his mom, Shirley Roberts, boarded with somebody in Grantsburg when she went to high school. A year out of high school and she was teaching. Some of those teachers were almost the same age as the students.

Ardell went to a one-room school in North Fork, five miles east of Grantsburg. He'd have to tear to get back when the bell rang, if he was out having fun in the woods. When he and his cousin were eighth graders, there were no seventh graders at that time. The teacher was often late getting to school. He and his cousin would start school themselves. "We had discipline then: nobody messed around with us! After the teacher came, then the students messed around." He built the fire in the wood stove before school started and swept up afterwards. He hauled in cordwood to burn, all through grade school.

Ardell didn't remember much about sibling births, but he said the first clue was that his mom would be knitting baby clothes. His aunt would come and stay with them. But he never heard the word "pregnant" until he was in high school. When women went to the hospital to give birth, they'd stay there for a week. Ardell said the cost of the hospital when he was born was \$35 in 1935.

When the conversation turned to telephones and party lines, Ardell commented that it was hard to get on the line because it was always busy.



*Since it was hard to buy things, and feed grain was sold in cloth sacks, his mom made a lot of clothes out of feed sacks for herself, Ardell's dad, and their five children.*

In the 1930s–1950s, everybody got together on Saturday nights to shop for groceries and visit. He remembers when they changed the shopping night to Friday instead of Saturday, and the farmers complained. They worked six days a week and still had to get up and work on Saturday morning, but the shopkeepers thought changing the shopping night would be better for their own schedules.

During World War II, the speed limits were cut to 35 mph so people wouldn't burn so much gas. That was one way the war was felt at home. One time his dad drove 40, and Ardell thought they were really cruising! You had to have stamps for rationed items you bought during the war, not only gas, but butter, sugar, and shoes too. Since it was hard to buy things, and feed grain was sold in cloth sacks, his mom made a lot of clothes out of feed sacks for herself, Ardell's dad, and their five children.

*In the 1930s-1950s, everybody got together on Saturday nights to shop for groceries and visit.*

One spring day in 1943, Ardell remembers hearing an engine running. A fellow was getting ready to go overseas and was flying to see his girlfriend in Superior before he left, only he got lost. He landed in a farmer's field across from Ardell's dad's. He ran out of gas. A tanker from the Twin Cities brought gasoline. It got cold and it rained overnight. The fellow went to take off the next morning. The farmers tried to crank the engine, but they couldn't get the plane started, so they had to get an auxiliary gasoline engine from Minneapolis to act as a starter for the plane. When he tried to take off in the field, he hit a puddle. He lost speed and had to turn to miss hitting people that were watching. As he turned, he crashed into the brush and went over a ravine. He shut off all the switches so the plane wouldn't catch fire. Another semi had to come haul the plane out. The fellow stayed with people there. He even came back after the war to visit them. While the airplane was there, they kept a guard on it twenty-four hours a day, so spies wouldn't

come see it. One neighbor thought there were "Japs" coming to see the plane. They ended up selling gas from the airplane to the farmers, though they had to mix it with regular gas to dilute it or reduce the octane. The front end of the plane was smashed, and the axle was broken off. The military paid for the gas for the plane, but the pilot probably got in trouble for wrecking the plane. The whole community came to watch; one didn't get to see an airplane often in those days.



**William (Willie) David Annis**

*Born: April 7, 1959*

WILLIE WAS BORN NEAR HUDSON, Wisconsin, and went to school there but now lives in Sarona. In 1995 or '96, Willie came to Forts Folle Avoine Historical Park and volunteered to teach skills and do re-enactments. (The site of two forts where fur traders met from 1802-04 near an Indian village, just north of Webster, includes an authentic woodland Indian village and reconstructed fur trading posts.) The park director subsequently offered him a job. Willie quit his job for an advertising agency and has been working at the fort ever since.

Willie interprets history to people who visit the fort. When dressed in period clothing, he uses the name Makwa ("Bear"). Willie tells the story of how the fort came to be: sturgeon came up the Yellow River, and both the Sioux and the Ojibwa coveted the area for fishing. The Sioux came first, but the Ojibwa eventually forced

them out. Both tribes needed trade goods. The Ojibwa wanted to be the middlemen between the Sioux and the White traders; they didn't want the Sioux in contact with the traders. Originally, the traders expected the Indians in the Great Lakes region to come to them, but then they realized they had to go to the Indians. Thus came the rendezvous and the establishment of trading posts like the two at Folle Avoine.

Large quantities of wild rice came out of the waters there for food and for trade. The fort was named after the wild rice. This place had a large concentration of native people here when the traders came. Because the Ojibwa kept a lot of dogs, their village was called Dog Town. Danbury's Dog Town was wiped out by an epidemic.

Although they were in fierce competition, two trading companies built within 95 feet of one another: the Northwest Company and the XY



*Willie helped reconstruct an authentic woodland Indian village where he interprets history at Forts Folle Avoine, near Danbury.*

SUSAN GILCHRIST

*Two trading companies in fierce competition set up their buildings in the same place. Fur traders met there from 1802 to 1804.*

Company. The Northwest Company had palisades, and the XY Company thought this would protect the traders. The palisades were merely to keep the winter elements and things out, not for protection against people. It was relatively easy to drive the posts into the sandy soil. The posts were all peaked so the water ran off them and didn't rot the wood. Nails were expensive and heavy, so people didn't use them much in those days, but in 1802, they did bring nails for building the fort, because they expected to be there a very long time.

The competition between the two trading companies was evident in one account. The XY Company had about fifteen kegs of wine. The voyageurs were drawn to the XY Company to sample the wine. People from the Northwest Company came and bored holes in all the XY kegs. "That's what the competition was like: whoever had the best alcohol did the best business."

In 1804, the place burned to the ground. The fire was blamed on the Sioux because there was a Sioux-style, side-seamed moccasin track following the departing people. When people left the fort, they were on their own, and it was generally not the policy to help anyone. But that spring, when the traders left, they looked back and saw plumes of smoke rising from the fort. It was their own Ojibwa hunters who burned it. It was probably one of them who wore the Sioux-style moccasins. The Sioux were known for using owl hoots to communicate, so when the Ojibwa heard owls, they were afraid they were going to be attacked. They didn't want to come back to



PHOTOS: FORTS FOLLE AVOINE HISTORICAL PARK

the fort, so they burned it all. All the appropriate-sized trees in the area had already been cut down so there was no more wood to rebuild. Awls, beads, gun shot, knives, and axes were left behind. The area was getting fished and trapped out. Thousands of pelts were being pulled out of there, to the benefit of the traders.

To provide some images of the fur trade and the voyageurs, Willie shared some stories he'd read in John Sayer's journal. Sayer was the "Bourgeois," the person in charge. George Nelson was a clerk at the fort for a while. He was only 16, but he'd been to school so he was put in charge of grown men, who resented it. He was a city boy coming to be a voyageur, but something always turned his stomach. Once, apparently, someone threw a duck on the fire, burned off the feathers, gutted the duck and ate some of the guts. George couldn't eat any. Another time he was about to eat a big chunk of

**William (Willie) David Annis** *(continued)*

venison when an Indian came toward him with his biggest, sharpest knife drawn from his legging: a frightening prospect, no doubt. But he walked right past Nelson and cut a piece from the venison, helping himself. Once the rollicking good times led to a farting contest, and someone pooped in the stew from the top of a tree. When Nelson saw someone just scoop out the contaminating stool, he could not eat the stew. It added to his indignation that a woman wiped a baby's butt with a knife and then used the knife to cut food. At least these are the kinds of things recorded. George Nelson wrote his reminiscences about his time at the fort some years later.

La Prairie was another clerk. Sometimes he gave too much away. But one time a Sioux gave La Prairie a pipe and tobacco to make peace with the Ojibwa. The clerk kept the pipe and just delivered the tobacco to the Ojibwa. The Ojibwa were offended at the receipt of nothing but a little

tobacco, and they began a war with the Sioux. Later, the story goes, the Ojibwa found out that La Prairie had kept the pipe. He should have been put to death, but he probably bought his life with all kinds of gifts. He was very much in debt to the company. He probably went to the Rice Lake Trading Post and was likely killed by Sioux there in 1805. He was with the Northwest Company.

Willie talked about what life was like at the time when the fort was active. A person needed four fish a day to survive the winter. They tried to dry fish. The voyageurs smelled like fish, lard, and dried peas. They had an aversion to water. The voyageurs believed they could get sick if they got wet, especially in winter, and none of them could swim. Although native medicine was probably much better, the voyageurs followed the European "medical" practice of blood letting. The native people may have used blood letting to relieve the pressure of a bruise, but it was a



*During the fur trade era, voyageurs and Indians relied on birch bark canoes like this one made at the Historical Park.*



*Modern-day re-enactors enjoy rendezvous days at places like Forts Folle Avoine. The sand country is rich in human history.*

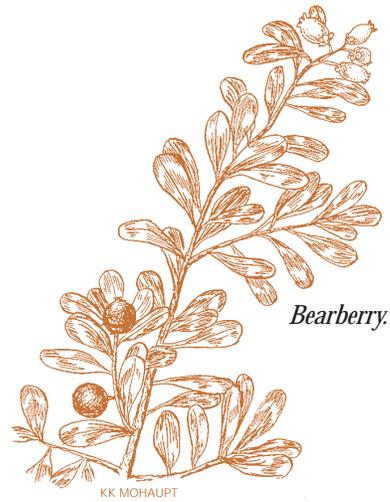
PHOTOS: SUSAN GILCHRIST

Willie's Ojibwa grandmother was a healer or gatherer who lived to be older than 96 and passed along knowledge about medicinal plants.

more limited use. The bourgeois was also considered the doctor. One tool in the medical kit was an enema tool. At the same time, back in Europe, people were eating tomatoes off pewter and lead plates. The acid in the tomatoes leached lead out of the plates and the people died, creating the belief that tomatoes were poisonous.

Willie told one incident from his own life. He was ice fishing, surrounded by a pack of dogs. The lead dog wouldn't leave when he stood up, so Willie gaffed him with a musky gaff hook and killed the dog. Even today, survival in the natural world can be a struggle.

But Willie had a headstart in learning about the gifts of the land. He had an Ojibwa grandmother who lived to be older than 96. She was a healer or gatherer, and she taught Willie many things. He is the keeper of knowledge and medicinal purposes for about 30 plants, and he passes the knowledge to those who will use it appropriately. He teaches his sons about hunting and trapping, his daughter about plants. Mostly he knows about the northern woodland flora and fauna, as he was taught. "This part of the country is a veritable medicine chest; it's a gold mine. No wonder they fought so hard over it," he said.



*Bearberry.*

*With woodland and prairie plants, the sand country is a veritable medicine chest to one who knows about their uses.*



GERALD BARTELT



**Clarence Arthur Wistrom**

*Born: January 18, 1909*

CLARENCE GREW UP NEAR TURTLE Lake, in Barron County, and worked in Spooner most of his life, yet he also referred to the area around Grantsburg in the interview. Clarence talked about Norman Stone and Burton Dahlberg, who are responsible for the creation of the large and popular Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. They changed a large marsh into a wildlife area by putting in small dams on the drainage outlets and building dikes to hold water. People liked it. The land had very little value for people before that time. Crex Meadows was owned by the Crex Carpet Company, which harvested grass for the manufacture of grass rugs. Clarence did not consider the carpet company a very successful operation. But Crex Meadows is very popular, drawing people interested in wildlife to this section of Wisconsin. The project began in the late 1930s. Norm worked in game management, but he was interested in waterways and stream improvement too. Norm was a good organizer, a good manager of projects, a man of power. Clarence first met him at the Grantsburg ranger station. They discussed hunting and the two men became good friends.

Norm's construction of roads was controversial. He laid out the road system at Crex Meadows. There were conflicts with the town officials, but Clarence said others finally accepted the road system and liked it.

There was a dam in Barron County on Lightening Creek, a large logging dam that had been constructed in 1890. The dam created a large lake. When the timber harvest ended, the dam was taken down. It's never been restored, and there's marshland there today. About 15 years prior to

*Norm Stone and Burt Dahlberg's work resulted in Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, which draws hundreds of people to the area to see wildlife, including trumpeter swans.*



SUSAN GILCHRIST



DAVE CREHORE

the interview, Clarence asked the town officials in Alma to restore the dam. The town officials objected to the dam because it would flood the town roads. They said, "You can't do that; it would eliminate our roads." If they had installed that dam, the entire shoreline would be developed today, and they'd be getting tax revenue. Clarence hopes that the project will develop in the future and the lake will be established.

It's the kind of project that Burt Dahlberg and Norm Stone would have gone ahead and done, without waiting for permission. They left many outstanding projects in this section of Wisconsin, and Clarence is proud that he had an opportunity to work with them. The result of Norm and Burt's work, Crex Meadows, draws hundreds of people to the area. People in Grantsburg and Siren appreciate that. The tourist attraction puts money in their pockets.

Clarence says the sand country has a beautiful future ahead as a result of the people in Spooner buying land and developing recreation areas. "They're buying up farms and planting trees," he said. Clarence thinks it's wonderful they're planting trees.

# Appendices



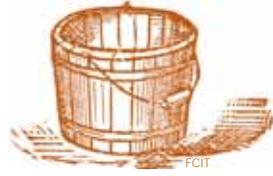
GERALD BARTELT

***Lolita has written books about her Chippewa heritage. She began writing with a quill pen, then pencils and fountain pens until the ballpoint came into vogue. She used a manual typewriter and then an electric typewriter and finally a computer.***

***Jim loves the Northwest Sands Area because it's so wild. Once at Crex Meadows, he and Shirley felt like they were being watched. They were both thrilled. It was the first time they had seen a wolf.***

# Appendices

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# Appendix A

## List of Interviewees

It is with the greatest appreciation that I offer this list of people who shared parts of their lives with me, their time, their memories, their opinions, and frequently their homes, as part of the Pine Barrens Oral History Project. To add to chronological understanding of their memories, I have included their birth dates.

- Anderson, Ardell Lowell – Jan. 22, 1935  
Annis, William David (Willie) – Apr. 7, 1959  
Aronson, Eleanor Bistram – Nov. 10, 1942  
Aronson, Milton Herman (Milt) – Dec. 29, 1939  
Bartelt, Gerald Allan (Jerry) – July 27, 1950  
Basna, Franklin (Frank) – June 25, 1914  
Becker, Robert John (Bob) – Mar. 26, 1927  
Bergerson, Raymond (Ray) – Mar. 4, 1913  
Christopherson,  
    Eugene Larry (Buddy) - July 11, 1934  
Christopherson, Sena Borup - Nov. 26, 1941  
Coffin, Steven C. (Steve) – Oct. 7, 1950  
Connor, Eugene (Gene) – July 25, 1928  
Connor, Lafayette (Faye) – Mar. 29, 1900  
Connor, Russell Lester (Russ) – Mar. 1, 1923  
Evrard, James Orvin (Jim) – July 19, 1942  
Follis, Walter (Buck) – June 6, 1939  
Frosch, Dorothy – Mar. 1, 1916  
Gokee, Alexander Louis (Ike) – Dec. 29, 1918  
Hanson, Betty Donis Lockert – Jan. 18, 1934  
Hoffman, Lowell Donald – Oct. 26, 1917  
Johnson, Berdella Gail Hanson – July 30, 1932  
Johnson, Andrew Paul (Andy) – Dec. 18, 1957  
Johnson, Daniel Wayne (Dan) – Sept. 8, 1956  
Johnson, David Eric – Nov. 21, 1954  
Johnson, Raymond (Bob) – Feb. 12, 1913  
Johnson, Thomas Richard (Tom) – Dec. 29, 1962  
Jordahl, Harold C., Jr. (Bud) – Aug. 18, 1926  
Karras, Kay Ramel – June 19, 1918  
Lampella, Francis – Dec. 2, 1919  
Lang, Floyd – Apr. 6, 1914  
Lang, Mariam Esther Lebeck – July 23, 1921  
Lord, Albert Lorin (Al) – Mar. 24, 1931  
Magnusen, Betty Irene Coos – Oct. 6, 1920  
Mason, William R. (Bill) – Sept. 8, 1923  
Munson, Kathryn – May 29, 1919  
Newago, Michael – Nov. 2, 1918  
Newago, Veronica (Babe) – June 18, 1935  
Oaks, Ron – Nov. 14, 1937  
Oaks, Chad – July 21, 1971  
Pratt-Shelley, Judith (Judy) – Jan. 24, 1959  
Rein, Helen – Oct. 9, 1918  
Sampson, Gladys Lord – Aug. 23, 1911  
Searles, Harold – Sept. 13, 1911  
Searles, Nora – May 30, 1915  
Shogren, Donald Lee (Don) – Nov. 13, 1919  
Shogren, Lois Elaine Lundberg – Dec. 8, 1928  
Smith, Lyndon Arthur (Lynny) – Feb. 1, 1913  
Soderbeck, Alice Johnson – Oct. 6, 1914  
Soderbeck, William (Bill) – May 30, 1915  
Strharsky, Catherine Jones (Katie) – Oct. 6, 1922  
Strharsky, Joseph (Joe) – Aug. 14, 1923  
Stromberg, Philip Theodore (Phil) – Oct. 27, 1953  
Taylor, Lolita Spooner – July 19, 1908  
Tutor, Marjorie Martell (Margie) – Jan. 15, 1912  
Welter, Matt – May 31, 1965  
Wicklund, Nina May Coos – Mar. 3, 1919  
Wistrom, Clarence Arthur – Jan. 18, 1909  
Zifco, Joyce – Oct. 27, 1953

## Appendix B

### **Messages from Interviewees to Land Management Planners Working in the Pine Barrens**

During the interviews regarding the Northwest Sands Area, people were asked specifically what messages they would like conveyed to land management planners. Here are some of the answers they gave:

- Leave it alone – don't manage it.
- Fewer people – there are too many.
- Restrict buildings on lakes and rivers.
- Keep the water clean.
- Don't farm the sand country – farming doesn't work.
- People need to work – consider economic impacts.
- The land doesn't do any good sitting there unused.
- Timber management is an important economic factor.
- Timber is the appropriate crop.
- Plant more trees.
- Plant oaks.
- Some burning is appropriate.
- Fire is a natural tool.
- You have to burn for good blueberry crops.
- We need a burn program.
- Make roads wide enough for fire control.
- Limit roads.
- Make specific places for ATV or RV use to curtail the damage they cause.
- Keep some places open for wildlife.
- Look for balance between open and forested country.
- Plant more diversity than pines.
- Work for sustainability.
- Consider the forest more than just money for the trees.
- Keep the barrens public.
- Keep it the same for our children.
- Manage for future generations.
- Include the tribes in management.
- Tell people what you're going to do and have a strategy for input.
- The barrens area is a rare treasure.

# Appendix C

## Time Line

- 12,000 years ago** Northern Wisconsin is covered by glaciers.
- 10,000 to 12,000 years ago** Glaciers retreat. A large glacial lake forms from the melt water of the retreating glacier. The lake is named Glacial Lake Grantsburg.
- 10,000 years ago** Glacial Lake Grantsburg begins draining away into the St. Croix River.
- 10,000 years ago to early 1600's** Glacial Lake Grantsburg continues to drain, glacial materials (sand) are repositioned by wind and water.  
Plants and wildlife evolve with climatic changes.
- Early 1600's** Native Americans are the only inhabitants of the area. They have little impact on the land and leave no written records.
- 1621** First record of Europeans in this area. Etienne Brule, a Frenchman engaged in the fur trade, established a trading post on Lake St. Croix.
- 1661-1662** French fur trader, Pierre-Esprit Radisson spent the winter hunting in the area.
- 1764** British take over the fur trade following the French and Indian War.
- 1802-1804** Forts Folle Avoine established by Northwest and XY Companies at Yellow Lake.
- 1830's** The LaPointe Trail is constructed through Crex Meadows. The trail is a mail route between Madeline Island and Fort Anthony (Fort Snelling) and used as a tote road for settlers.
- 1832** Last reported buffalo in Wisconsin.
- 1837** Chippewa Treaty allowed white settlement of the area.
- 1840** Last report of caribou in Wisconsin.
- 1842** First Territorial Road authorized from St. Croix Falls to Clam Lake.
- 1851** First hunting law enacted (closed season for deer from February 1 to July 1).
- 1853** Canute Anderson is the first white settler in the area.  
Government land survey of the area is completed.
- 1865** Burnett County is created.  
Last known elk killed in Wisconsin.
- 1871** Widespread fires in the area due to drought.  
Bayfield Road authorized on the route of existing La Pointe Trail through Crex Meadows.  
Commercial harvest of cranberries begins.
- 1877** Marshland Hotel (later known as Smith's Stopping Place) built in Crex Meadows along Bayfield Road.
- 1890** Crex marshes ditched and drained by Marshland Farming Company.  
Prairie chickens abundant near Grantsburg.

*Continued on next page.*

## Appendix C

- 1896** A record 4,277 crates of blueberries are shipped from Grantsburg.  
First year that licenses are required for deer hunting.
- 1899** Last report of passenger pigeons in Wisconsin.
- 1901** American Grass Twine (later to become the Crex Carpet Company),  
debuts on New York Stock Exchange. List 30,000 shares at \$45.00 per share.
- 1903** American Grass Twine is the largest industry in St. Paul, MN.
- 1907** Smith's Stopping Place is destroyed by a wildfire.
- 1911** The "Big Meadows" (Crex Meadows) north of Grantsburg is purchased by the  
Crex Carpet Company.
- 1912** Kreinersville, once a thriving village north of Crex, is abandoned due to a decline  
in the logging, blueberry, and cranberry industries.
- 1922** Homesteaders report severe sandstorms.  
Farms in the sand country are selling for \$2.00 per acre.
- 1925** Crex Carpet Catalog advertises De Luxe Rugs for \$16.00.  
Imported grass rugs from Japan advertised for \$2.98.
- 1931-1933** Severe drought causes large wildfires in Burnett County.  
Many farms in the "sand country" are abandoned.
- 1934** The buildings at Crex Carpet Camp Number 6 are torn down for salvage.  
Crex Carpet Company lists 23,000 acres of meadow land for sale.
- 1935** Crex Carpet Company files for bankruptcy.  
Their bank statement shows a balance of \$24.90.
- 1937** Bankrupt Crex Carpet Company lands revert to the ownership of Burnett County.
- 1946** Wisconsin Conservation Commission approves purchase of former Crex Carpet  
Lands from Burnett County to begin a new public hunting ground, named the Crex  
Meadows Public Hunting Ground.
- 1947-1948** Prescribed burning begins at Crex.  
First dikes constructed to reflood drained wetlands.
- 1951** Work begins on 2,200 acre Phantom Lake Flowage.
- 1952** Giant Canada Goose reintroduction project begins at Crex Meadows.
- 1972** Prairie chicken restoration project begins at Crex Meadows.
- 1975** Norm Stone, the first project manager of Crex Meadows, retires.
- 1984** The Friends of Crex is established as a support group for Crex Meadows.
- 2002** Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center is completed. Funding for the  
building provided by the Friends of Crex.

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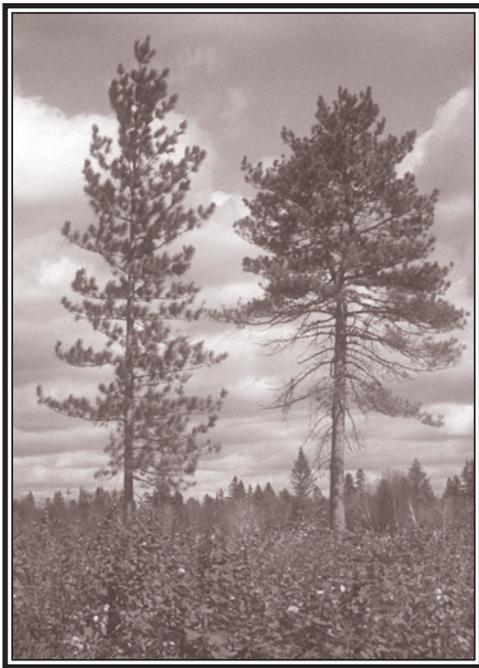
## About the Author



Susan Cantrell Gilchrist conducted the Pine Barrens Oral History Project for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from 1998 to 2003. As a child in Pennsylvania, she attended a Waldorf school where stories were a primary learning tool. In 1969 she graduated from Wells College as an English major, then received her Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Cornell University in 1971. After moving to Wisconsin in 1977, Susan became involved with local and regional storytelling communities and began telling stories professionally. Once she began working for Wisconsin DNR in 1989, she combined her interest in interpreting history and nature through storytelling with professional experience as a researcher using interviewing as a data collection tool. Susan enthusiastically embraced oral history to support ecosystem management. Prior to this, she evaluated the *Project WILD* wildlife education program in Wisconsin, developed the *One Bird–Two Habitats* education program on migratory birds, conducted focused discussions among teachers regarding teaching about hunting, fishing, and trapping, and interviewed researchers for a Science Services biennial report, all within Wisconsin DNR. Previously, Susan worked in human services, child care, childbirth education, adolescent health, and other education-related positions.

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