

# Covering summer recreation and the Chain O' Lakes for 130 years

This summer marks the beginning of the 59th volume of the *Picture Post*. Founded by the late Carl L. Turner, it debuted on June 23, 1950, and was dedicated to promoting Waupaca's Chain O' Lakes by providing valuable information about, and eye-catching photos of, the lakes and the people who vacationed there.

Over the ensuing six decades the *Picture Post* has grown to become the premier summer vacation publication in central Wisconsin. Each issue is filled with photos and information designed to help make summer more enjoyable for visitors and residents alike.

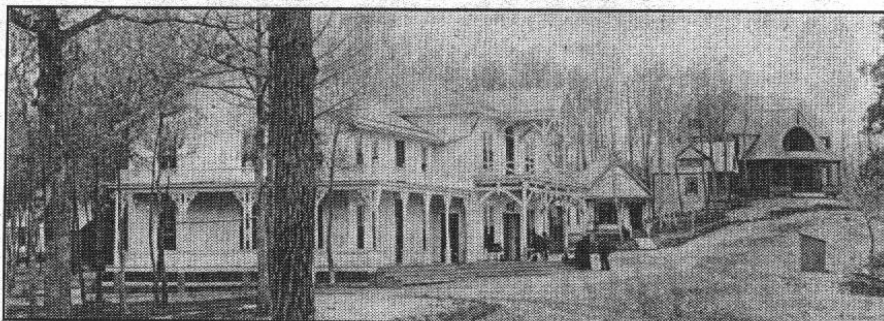
This summer the *Picture Post* continues a proud tradition of promoting tourism and summer fun in the area that was begun 130 years ago by its parent publication – the *Waupaca County Post*.

In July 1878, when there wasn't even a single cottage on Waupaca's Chain O' Lakes, the *Post* encouraged its readers to consider the possibility of building a summer resort on the Chain.

The following summer a *Post* editorial suggested: "If the citizens do as much for Waupaca as nature has done, there is not the slightest reason why we could not have one of the coziest and prettiest little places in the state."

On July 19, 1879, the *Post* reported the construction of a boathouse and the development of a camping area: "Every day new discoveries are being made in the beauties of Waupaca and vicinity, and constantly pleasure-seekers are finding it out ... People from cities go to Menasha, to Ashland and other places to find rest and pleasure. Waupaca is best of all, and time will prove it."

The *Post* article noted that land along the shore of Rainbow Lake (then known as Hicks Lake) had been leased for tent camping by M. Reed and E.C. Bronson of Waupaca. "These gentlemen have erected a large boathouse, and another is in the process of being erected by C.



**The Greenwood Park Hotel, on the east shore of Rainbow Lake, was the first resort on the Chain. When the property became the Grand Army Home in 1887, the building was renamed Marden Hall.**

Churchill and Ole Olsen," the writer explained.

"A fine hotel for the accommodation of summer visitors will be built there within a year or two," he predicted. "Some man will make money there by doing that, no mistake."

The prediction of a hotel on that site didn't take long to become a reality. Two years later a group of Waupaca citizens formed an association and began construction of the Greenwood Park Hotel. Six years later, in 1887, the hotel and surrounding property were given to the veterans of Wisconsin, thereby assuring the development of the Wisconsin Veterans Home in King. Early accounts of the improvements that followed were carried in a special column of the *Waupaca Post* devoted exclusively to coverage of activities at the Chain O' Lakes.

In the summer of 1930, Roy W. Pinkerton began publishing a four-page flier called the "Chain O' Lakes Bulletin," the first separate publication to cover the events at the lakes, which continued publication until 1941.

In 1931 the *County Post* began publishing the Chain O' Lakes Guide, which continued until 1950 when a change in ownership of the paper brought about the first issue of the *Picture Post*.

In that first *Picture Post*, Turner saluted Pinkerton and warmly welcomed vis-

itors. "We hope your stay here, however brief or extended, will be a memorable and happy one, every moment of it," he wrote.

"The Chain O' Lakes and the city of Waupaca are indivisibly united because of their proximity and to their mutual advantage. Waupaca is fortunate in having one of Wisconsin's finest vacation spots at its very doorstep; the lakes are fortunate in having a city of such friendly neighbors and progressive stores and amusement places at their side.

"Since their interests are so interwoven, it follows that the newspaper which has served Waupaca faithfully for so many decades should also be the medium for serving the Chain O' Lakes visitors," Turner added.

Besides the launch of the *Picture Post*, the summer of 1950 was noteworthy in many other respects. It was a cold, damp summer, according to weather records. Nighttime temperatures were frequently in the low 40s and daytime highs seldom exceeded the mid-60s. During the week of July 14, 5.84 inches of rain fell.

Among the more famous visitors to the lakes that summer was Jo Fischer, a cartoonist for the *Chicago Sun Times* and creator of "9 to 5," a daily cartoon feature carried by 93 newspapers. To

commemorate his visit to the area, Fischer drew a cartoon especially for the *Picture Post* that illustrated the beauty of the Chain O' Lakes.

Perhaps the most-remembered event of the summer of 1950 was the destruction of the building on Crescent Island that was commonly known as the Esther Williams cottage, but was actually built by the family of her husband at the time, Ben Gage.

A fire of undetermined origin swept through the structure during the early morning hours of Aug. 31, leaving only the fireplace chimney standing. In the years immediately prior to the fire, the island cottage, always a subject of interest for vacationers and sightseers, had suffered significant damage at the hands of souvenir hunters and other vandals. Some speculated that one or more individuals might have been on the island during the previous night and left a burning cigarette that touched off the blaze.

In addition to uncertainty regarding the cause of the fire, there's also uncertainty as to whether Williams actually ever stayed at the cottage. She is, however, indelibly linked to the Chain O' Lakes, and remains a part of its alluring mystic.

In that first issue, Turner also pledged to tailor the *Picture Post* to the needs of friends from near and far. "We hope our publication will please you and that you will find it interesting. We solicit your cooperation in gathering news about yourselves and your friends at the lakes. We invite your suggestions for pictures, too. Again, we extend a hearty greeting and best wishes for a wonderful time."

That philosophy and commitment remains as strong and firm today as it did when the first *Picture Post* came off the press: Please call me at 715-258-5546 with your article ideas and photo suggestions.

Dan Hansen, Editor