

McGill George 1975

Waupaca County Post
June 12, 1975

Insights Worth Remembering

The Taping Committee of the Waupaca Historical Society is taping interviews with older citizens of the community who have experiences and insights worth remembering. The Rev. Wm. F. Donnelly, Mr. George Jeffers, and Mr. John Holzman taped the following in an interview with Mr. George McGill recently.

“I was born on the McCrossen farm north of Rural in 1887. I am 87-1/2 years old. I lived on the Schrock farm with my father until I was ten years old. Then my father wanted to be a plumber so he moved to Minnesota. Later I acquired that farm of 176 acres. I kept it and I sold it to the Schrocks in 1920. Sterling owns it now. I’m Scotch-Irish. My grandfather came here directly from Ireland. He was a shoemaker. He bought 40 acres of land west of Rural. He went to the Civil War and came home and died. My father married a McCrossen. She was half Scotch and half Irish.”

“I went one year to high school. But I always wanted to be a farmer, so I withdrew, since it was not compulsory to stay in school. I have always followed the land. I enjoy nature greatly. Even today I consider myself to be a farmer. After I retired, because I like nature, I took up with McKay Nursery, and I’ve enjoyed it very much.”

“When I was farming we used horse-drawn vehicles. We cut the grain with a binder and then stacked it. Then the threshing machine came with about thirteen men. We had lots of chicken for dinner. In our neighborhood there were not mid-morning and mid-afternoon lunches. We thought it silly. There was a ten hour day, and we expected the men to work ten hours.”

“We had one boy – he’s gone now. He passed away in 1970. When he was ready to go to high school, we moved to the place where we are now on Union St.”

“I’ve often thanked God because I lived in the best years the world has ever known. Everyone was considered to be honest until he proved himself dishonest. We could leave a piece of farm machinery by the side of the road, people didn’t steal it or damage it. Nowadays you can’t leave anything sitting around anywhere.”

“Being Scotch-Irish, I’m known for being conservative. I’ve always been opposed to this financial system. When I bought my farm, I tried to get money on a five year term. It couldn’t be done; I had to get a three year term. They said I could always renew it. Then the St. Paul Branch of the First Savings and Loan came here. They were giving a twenty-year mortgage. That was the first I heard of extended debts. Today it’s not uncommon for farmers to have a \$100,000 debt. Fred Darling and I always battled because I don’t believe in twenty year mortgages. I think I was proved right by the amount of debt that is saddled on the next generation.”

“Where Cook’s Plumbing is was the ‘Live and Let Live Shop’. It was one of the (word missing on copy) business places in Waupaca, because of the many horse-drawn vehicles. It was also one of the oldest, being erected in the 1880’s. There was a blacksmith shop in one side of the building and wagons for sale on the other, with surreys up above.”

The paper icebox which I gave to Hutchinson House had a date 1885. It was owned by a man who worked for the A.M. Penney Co., the biggest potato company we had here. Penney built the house now owned by Norman Clayton. This man sold the icebox in 1940. I saw it in the electric company window. I’ve always been interested in old things so I bought it. I was offered good money for it, but I wanted to leave it for posterity.”

We used to have a constable to keep order about in the country, but he didn’t have much to do. People were honest. When someone broke the law, he was quickly brought to justice. Not like it is now when it takes months or years. Once in a while someone had too much liquor. But we had temperance meetings here, and big crowds packed the hall at Camp Cleghorn. Lots of people made fun of the meetings,

but we were really hitting 'old barleycorn'. There was a song 'Put in a little liquor to make it a little thicker to cover up the rotten spots.'

"Intoxicated people were immediately taken off the streets and put in jail. There's more drinking now, but we don't actually see people staggering on the streets.

"Cam Cleghorn on Long Lake was owned by the temperance people. It was one of the most godly places. It accomplished a lot of good in the two-week session every summer. I learned to be temperant very early. I think liquor is one of the strongest curses to hit this world. Julia Hutchinson was president of the W.C.T.U. My wife was a member, Mrs. Rosche Bliss was a strong member. They were godly people.

"When I lived on the farm, I was on the schoolboard in District 7. We paid the teacher \$18 a month in the summer. Some of the children went to school while others worked in the fields. In the winter lots of bigger boys came to school and the teacher got \$24 a month. The teacher built the fire or paid one of the bigger boys to built it. She would pay him 50 cents a week. Water was carried from the next house below in a wooden pail. The school was located on Highway K. Dale Sawyer bought it and put it on his land."

"I always thought I was a pretty good ball player when I was growing up. We played the Waupaca team once, but we got beat. But we gave them a good exhibition. I've always regretted that I played ball on Sundays. I now obey the commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy explicitly and have for many years. My wife and her folks were very devoted to the church at Parfreyville. In those days they really believed in the Bible and followed it. If John Wesley were to come now, he wouldn't recognize the church. Churches are changed through modernism and materialism."

One of the most noted men to appear here was Bob LaFollette, Sr. He spoke at the Danes' home. Mr. A.G. Nelson met him at the depot in his buggy. They went to the hall with a band in front of them LaFollette took this area by storm. That's because he was fighting the railroads. That was his main issue. He could really lay it on to them. The first vote I cast was for Bob LaFollette."