



The Pinery

PUBLISHED NOW & THEN BY THE PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Stevens Point, Wisconsin

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General Meeting, Tuesday, Oct. 12, 1971.

The Portage County Historical Society will hold a general meeting, 7:30 p.m. room 106 of the Byron B. Park Student Services Center building (the former University Library Building) on Fremont Street. We hope that the membership will come, bring friends and make it known far and wide that the general public is welcome.

Professor Rene Alltmont, historian, State University at Stevens Point will address the society. Professor Alltmont is making a study of the Peshtigo fire of 1871. He will bring a fresh approach to that holocaust, a disaster that took more than five times the number of lives lost in the Great Chicago Fire which occurred the same day. Our speaker examines particularly the social and humanitarian aspects of the tragedy.

Those needing transportation may call 344-5308.

Society Tour...

Plans were being made for a trip to historic Portage, Fort Winnebago Surgeon's Quarters and the Indian Agency House where much of our county's history has its roots. Since the State and Local History Council is having a tour of Portage as part of the State Historical Society's Annual Institute of Local History, we have decided to join that event. The date is Friday, Oct. 1, 1971. A luncheon will be held at the Ram Hotel in Portage at noon. Mrs. Ina Curtis, local historian of the Portage sites will give an introductory talk at the luncheon.

Buses will leave the Ram Hotel at 1 p.m. for the tour of historic sites, returning at 4 p.m. Luncheon is \$2.75, bus at Portage is \$2.00, entrance to the Indian Agency House and Surgeon's Quarters is \$1.75. Forms for registration are available at the Stevens Point Public Library and from members of the board.

Your phone call, as soon as possible, (344-5308) will help in planning transportation, which will be by private car.

State Historical Society Wisconsin Calendars

These calendars are once again available from the society. Please buy from those who sell them for the benefit of the Portage County Historical Society. They are available at \$1.50 each at the Stevens Point Public Library, from the University Bookstore located in the Student Center building or from any member of the board.

The Byron B. Park Student Services Center

In June the University Archives was the scene of a luncheon to commemorate Judge Byron B. Park and to honor especially four graduates of the 1894 original training school class: Ross Joy, Gladys Park Joy, Ellida Moen, and W. E. Atwell. Mrs. Atwell and President Dreyfus were also at the luncheon.

A display of photos and other memorabilia is in the exhibit case in the lobby of the building. It will be held there until after the general meeting of the Society. Gladys Park Ross donated many of the items on display.

The Gothic Recess...

It is hard to imagine that elegance to any considerable degree existed in pioneer Portage County of the 1850's, but people of affluence and influence traveled to and through and resided in Stevens Point, so why not? Land was cheap and developing, and rich timber lands were close by. Perhaps it is not so surprising to find the editor of the Pinery singing the praises of "good food and drink" at an establishment with the entrancing name, The Gothic Recess.

It was a restaurant-saloon, opened just before Christmas of 1858 by L.D.Conery. On Feb. 19, 1859 it was the gay scene of a dinner for the Pinery staff. Early in April, Mrs. Conery opened a "ladies department" on the second floor, which by July was called "The Ladies Salon" ... with a shade tree planted by the door."

In October 1859, Mr. Conery came back from the state fair in Milwaukee with "premium peaches, fresh oysters and delicacies." That its fame had spread seemed assured by a note in the Central Wisconsin (Wausau) that it was a "very good establishment." In December 1860 the Gothic Recess boasted that "oysters could still be purchased by the plate at the low sum of 25¢".

By Christmas 1861 the romantic name had been dropped in favor of the L.D.Conery Restaurant, announcing in the Wisconsin Lumberman an apparent expansion; he was now "able to furnish at all times, oysters by the dish, can or case, also confectioneries, Yankee notions, jewelry, gold and silver watches, green and dried fruits, tobacco and segars."

The Civil War seemed to end the Gothic Recess, at least in name, perhaps in spirit and style. Pat Collins in his 1880 reminiscing stroll on the south side of Main Street one by one marking off in his mind's eye the shops, stores, emporiums and saloons from the river to Strongs Ave., noted L.D.Conery's restaurant still there "good for a bowl of oyster stew."

Tap Snilloc (Pat Collins) on Jacobs House.

It was in 1872 (Pat Collins was age 3) that Nicholas Jacobs founded the celebrated Jacobs House on Clark Street. This establishment held a very loving place in Tap Snilloc's recollections, all the way to its closing in 1916. He wrote a splendid nostalgic piece about it. The piece is printed below.

Stevens Point and Portage County is indebted to Pat Collins for the series of reminiscent and historic pieces he wrote in the Stevens Point Journal, 1926-1935. They represent a very important source of local history. By drawing from the several collections of Elizabeth Collins Pfiffner Debot (his daughter), of Win & Edith Rothman and Alex Wallace and from the Stevens Point Journal itself, the Society now believes it has drawn all these writings together.

The Passing of the Jacobs House by Tap Snilloc

The history of any town centers around the gathering places of its inhabitants, and especially if it is the rendezvous of the traveling public. When the city was young, and had growing pains, the center of civic life was around the old hotels that catered to the public and served as a vehicle of information for a large class of people. Old timers are prone to reminisce of the days of the city's early history and invariably their thoughts center around some incident that happened at the Curran house, the Mansion house or at the Jacobs house, in the days gone by.

The passing of an old landmark, such as the Jacobs house, calls to mind many interesting episodes in the life of this old hotel. It recalls to me many pleasant memories of my boyhood days, for this old hostelry was the gathering place of all the boys in our neighborhood...

The founder of this old hotel was Nicholas Jacobs, who came to America soon after the Civil War and settled in these parts. Mr. Jacobs was a carpenter by trade, and the first job he obtained was on the construction of St. Martin's church at Ellis. It was at this place he met his

future wife and in June 1868, he was married to Katherine Gross, a member of one of the pioneer families of Ellis. It was about this time he formed a partnership with Joseph Schwebach, and they built and conducted a hotel on the site where the Wisconsin State Bank is now located. It was at this place that P.J. and Nicholas, Jr. was born. In 1872 this partnership was dissolved and Mr. Jacobs purchased the property on Clark St. and erected the main part of the hotel in that year.

Originally it was a two-story structure with a basement. In 1881 the east wing was built and a few years after, a third story was added. A large barn was built in the rear with a capacity for fifty teams. The hotel catered to the farming trade and the place was the gathering center for all the farmers for miles around. In early days this old hotel sported no modern conveniences, the rooms were large with four or five beds in each room and it was no uncommon occurrence to find the guests doubled up, two in a bed, and sometimes they were lucky to even get that accomodation.

In the long hall on the second floor a large stand was located and on it was an array of candlesticks, filled with long tapering candles that were used to light the guests to bed. Each room had a small box stove for heating purposes and it was the duty of P.J. to rouse the guests each morning and build the fires in the rooms. No utensils were furnished for the morning ablutions, but each guest came down stairs and used the sink in the office and dried himself on the long roller towel.

In my callow youth the large barn at the back of the lot was presided over by Patrick Quigley, the hostler. Patrick was a typical son of Erin with a mellow wit and an irascible temper. The prices charged for service at this old hotel were 25¢ for dinner and 10¢ extra for hay for the teams. Wood was the fuel used to heat the building, and Mr. Jacobs early realized that this item was a real financial problem. The hotel used about 200 cords of good hard maplewood per annum and in order to cheapen this

outlay he purchased a forty of land about eight miles from town, on the Mill Creek road, and each winter he would have a crew of men in on the land to cut the wood and haul it to the city. You would often see a couple of hundred cords of wood piled up in the back yard, seasoning for the next year.

The Jacobs boys were strong for chickens, rabbits and doves and became real experts in the business. They always kept several cows to furnish milk and cream for the hotel and it was the duty of the older boys to take care of the cows and see that they were brought home every evening for milking.

...in the early days one of the clerks at the Jacobs house was John Martini who got his first insight in American ways at this old hostelry. In the basement was located the bar, a popular gathering place, and it was here that Eintrachts Verein had its inception.

In my youth the hotel was patronized by the traveling show companies and medicine men. The Charley Ma Grau troupe of medicine men stopped here and sold their dope in a tent on the edge of the slough. Each day their band would parade the streets, headed by the long-haired doctor who did the bally-hoo. Hattie Irving and her troupe of players made their headquarters here and played in the old rink to capacity crowds. Hattie was some actress and we young lads always held down the front seats to see Hattie do her stuff. How many can remember Allie, the Witch of Denver? She registered at this old hotel and startled the natives with her daring ride down Main Street, blind-folded and driving a pair of prancing steeds. The magician, Signor Boska, mystified his audience with his dexterity in legerdermain. The Signor was a faker of the first water, but knew his stuff and with the assistance of a group of lads that hung around the hotel, he put on a good show.

When Uncle Tom's Cabin company came to town we were there to receive them with open arms. The bloodhounds, the donkey, Little Eva, Uncle Tom, Marks, the lawyer, and all the rest of the troupe were the cynosure of our youthful eyes.

When the Ringling Circus played this circuit and pitched their tents on the east side of town, down near the shops, the Ringlings stopped at the Jacobs house. There were five brothers, count 'em: Alf, Al, Charley, Henry and John. That was a red letter day in our lives, in those days we thought if we could get within talking distance of a circus man we had something to talk about for the rest of our days. At this time the Ringling Circus was in the embryo stage, but the performance was good, the attendance large, and we voted the entertainment first class. A number of the performers stopped at the Jacobs house and P.J. was sent out to the grounds to collect for their lodgings. He presented the bill and was paid in silver dollars. It was then up to him to get the coin back to the hotel. He shouldered the heavy sack containing the coin and trundled along, carrying the heavy burden...

About 1893 William Cupp was installed as manager and the place was changed from a farmers' hotel to a commercial house. This enhanced the hotel's reputation among the traveling public. Many men of note enjoyed the hospitality of the Jacobs. William J. Bryan, Senator LaFollette, Senator Ben Tillman, Eugene Debs, Opie Reid, H.I. Henry, Al Fields, the minstrel men, Bessie Bonehill, Black Patti, William Owen, Carl Gardner were entertained there. When the Elks Lodge was installed it held its first banquet at the Jacobs and it was the talk of the town for months after. When the railway conductors gave their annual balls in the rink, the Jacobs fed the multitude who attended these parties.

In 1896 Mrs. Jacobs passed on and in her passing the Jacobs house lost an able supervisor and the city a good and

charitable woman. Many a poor family was assisted by this kind lady and no one who appealed to her for aid was ever refused. About 1900 Nicholas Jacob Jr., took over the management of the hotel and continued as manager for a number of years. He was succeeded by his sisters, Tina and Gertrude, who managed the hotel until its sale to the Stevens Point Hotel Co., in 1921.

The passing of the Jacobs house is like the departure of a dear friend. For years it was the center of local activity for our people...

Time makes many changes in the personal appearance of a city. Progress takes toll of many old and cherished landmarks that marks the onward sweep of a modern city's advancement. To the younger generation this change means civic pride in the city's progress, to the old timers it is the realization of the changing times and conditions in the old home town, the passing of old landmarks dear to them. In the evolution of time these changes will happen, but it is with a sigh of regret that we see them go.

Annual Dues

If you haven't paid your dues for this year, please send your \$1 to the treasurer now.

Buy the 1972 Wisconsin Calendar to the benefit of the PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

*Remember the General Meeting -- Tuesday,
October 12, 1971
7:30 p.m., Student Services Center*

THE PINERY is issued by the PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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