



The Pinery

PUBLISHED NOW & THEN BY THE PORTAGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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FOR THE RECORD

MONTHLY MEETING SCHEDULE

Listed below are the dates and programs of upcoming meetings sponsored by the PCHS. Society members and the general public are encouraged to attend.

Oct. 1 -- 2 p.m. DEDICATION AND CORNERSTONE laying at the Museum in Plover. (Museum--formerly "old Methodist Church"--located directly behind Cash and Carry lumber store). Paul Hartman will provide an exhibit of implements and tools. Refreshments will be served--"old fashioned donuts" from a 100 year old recipe, coffee, and cider. Copies of donut recipe will be available for purchase.

Nov. 15 - If possible, a meeting will be held outside of Stevens Point, somewhere in the county. (See SPECIAL NOTE below). Otherwise, there will be a meeting (7.30 p.m.) in the Sentry Building Auditorium downtown Stevens Point. Film on the "Historic Restoration of Williamsburg" will be shown. Please check Stevens Point Journal for verification of place and time.

Dec. 6 -- 7.30 p.m. CHRISTMAS PARTY at County City Building (tentative) in Stevens Point. John Anderson will exhibit antique postcards of Wisconsin and additional postcards will be on display. Refreshments will be served. Check Stevens Point Journal for verification.

* ***** SPECIAL NOTE *****

* The Program Committee of the PCHS would like to arrange for meetings outside of Stevens Point for every other month, on the 3rd Wednesday of that month. For example, the Committee hopes to hold the meetings of November 15, January 17 and March 21 outside of Stevens Point. If you would like to suggest a meeting site or have an idea for a program or would like to help work up a "county" program please contact Ellen Johnson (341-2129-after 4 p.m.) or Marjorie Warner (341-0355) or Doris Travis (344-3730).

* Also, if any of our readers would like to volunteer to help the Program Committee arrange monthly meetings in general and other Society events such assistance would be greatly appreciated. Please contact Ellen Johnson.

* ***** SPECIAL NOTE *****

MUSEUM

The Museum Committee is now accepting donations of items for display in the Portage County Museum. If you have an item that reflects the history, spirit or traditions of Portage County (or Wisconsin) please contact Doris Travis (344-3730) or John Anderson (341-2786) or any member of the Board of Directors. All donations accepted will be greatly appreciated and will enable the Society to meet its task of "preserving the past for the good of the future".

Due to the financial assistance (\$8000) of the Village of Plover two lots adjacent

to the Museum have been purchased. These two additional lots are necessary to allow the PCHS and the Village of Plover to plan for adequate landscaping, additional historical exhibits and visitor parking.

The Property Committee of the PCHS, in consultation with an architect, have set re-roofing, window repair and replacement and exterior painting as the immediate priorities of the Church/Museum restoration project.

PCHS ACTIVITIES

Don Isherwood was the winner of the second annual Win Rothman Local History Award. He received the \$150 prize for his research essay entitled "Plover Portage" in which he discussed how various **factors**, including natural features and climate, have unified the area throughout the past.

Wendell Nelson has resigned from the Board of Directors of the Society but has agreed to continue serving as Corresponding Secretary. Tim Siebert is the new Recording Secretary.

The Society has agreed to sponsor a proposal of John Morser (UW-SP Political Science) and Thomas Bloom (UW-SP English) to prepare a photographic exhibit on the life styles of central Wisconsin. If the proposal is funded and the project completed the Society will benefit by receiving copy prints of all exhibit photographs and the opportunity to display the exhibit in the Plover Museum. Sponsorship does not obligate the Society financially as the project would be federally funded.

GENEALOGY

The Secretary of the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society, Miss Betty Patterson, has informed us of a significant Bicentennial publication entitled Some Pioneer Families of Wisconsin--An Index. The publication contains the names of nearly 10,000 early Wisconsin settlers in alphabetical order. Additional information includes birth date and place, death date, name of spouse, county of settlement, and name of descendant a researcher may contact. The publication is 182 pages and sells for \$5.00 (plus 20 cents tax for Wisconsin residents). Copies can be obtained from the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society, Box 5106, Madison Wi. 53705.

ADDITION TO THE COLLECTION

The Society has acquired from the Charles White Memorial Library a duplicate set of Ernest Lilien's partially completed English-Polish dictionary. The first section of the projected 40 section work was published in January 1944 and the 19th section in December 1951. Entries run from A to hellbind.

Mr. Lilien was a former resident of Stevens Point residing at 725 North Division Street. He was born in Lwow (then in Austria-Hungary) on June 19, 1872. He attended the University of Lwow and came to the United States in 1913. He then worked for several Polish language newspapers in Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, Toledo, Milwaukee and eventually Stevens Point. He was a member of the Worzalla Publishing Co. editorial staff until 1936 during which time he was an associate of Adam Bartosz. He was subsequently employed by the Stevens Point Daily Journal for one year as a part time feature writer on the history of Poland. Thereafter he devoted most of his time and energy to his dictionary. Mr. Lilien often expressed the hope that he would live long enough to see the completion of his project but feared he would not. Mr. Lilien died in June 1952 in Barrington, Illinois at the age of 80 years.

Although incomplete, the dictionary is a dramatic testimony to Ernest Lilien's scholarship and ambition.

THE MAILBOX

Editor's note: The following information on the New Hope cemetery was kindly sent to the Society by Mr. Jerry Lund of Wausau. The source is a book entitled Fra Indianernes Lande (The Land of the Indians) by T. Helgeson, published ca. 1915. According to Malcolm Rosholt, Helgeson was a traveling school teacher who traveled and taught in different townships of Portage County.

The entire book has been translated from Norwegian into English by Malcolm Rosholt and published serially in the Iola Herald newspaper in 1969.

The Ole Lund mentioned in the description is the Great, Great, Grandfather of Jerry Lund.

If any readers have genealogical information on the Lund family they should contact Mr. Jerry Lund, 1118 South 12th Street, Wausau, Wi. 54401 7

---from page 130---

Around the middle of the fifties there was prepared a graveyard or cemetery on the Kankrud farm in New Hope. About at the same time there was also prepared a graveyard on the Lars Nilson farm--the so called Krognes farm in the town of Iola. It was first the intention that a church should be built at each of these graveyards. But when it was laid out, a new graveyard on the Røe farm in New Hope, and it was decided that a church should be built there, then the other graveyards became superfluous. The plow has gone over them and the graves have disappeared without a trace. Not a single marker is found, to remind the next generations about these old and venerable burial places from the pioneer days.

Kankrude cemetery, which in the mid 50's was consecrated by pastor Nils Brandt, is now passed on to oblivion. Not less than 35--big and small, mostly small were buried here. Some may have been moved to New Hope cemetery, but most of them are left in this dead peoples yard at Kankrud.

The first they laid to rest in this graveyard was the suffering daughter of Johan and Marte Voldengen.

Of others, who stayed to rest in this "Godsgarden", are named: Lars Modoms wife.

Ragnhild Hjartsjaa the young 21 years, and Ida Hjartsjaa, 11 years, daughters of Ola and Ragnhild Hjartsjaa from Hjartdal.

Jente Johanne Hansdatter Stettrud from Gausdal.

Marte Gryte from Gausdal, Ola Floms first wife.

Elland Aurstad from Gausdal, brother to Kristian Aurstad (Olstad).

Karl and Gustav Ula, sons of Anders Ula (or Ura) and wife Gusta Kalvel, both from Gjerpen.

Two children of Johannes and Ronnog Krokvolden.

Two children of John Rasmusson Vesli and wife Ingeborg.

and many more.

And, if I am not completely mistaken, Hunt Master Ole Lund from Fossom is also buried in this graveyard. At one time he got lost in the woods, and wandered about for 13 days and lived on wild berries. When his neighbors came upon him unexpectedly, "he ran like a wild bird".

On this graveyard Amund Mikkelsen has given many good funeral orations, even before he studied for the ministry, said an old settler from the Kankrud area, as he usually stayed here when he was home. Yes, he preached so that the tears twinkled and rolled down the cheeks of everyone, young and old.

New Hopes first church was built on the Røe farm in 1864. It was consecrated on Whitsunday 1864 by Pastor Mikkelsen, who also performed the first confirmation there in the mid-60's.

CLIO'S CORNER

Editor's Note: The following historical essay was written especially for The Pinery by Thomas F. Reitz, a graduate student in history at the UWSP. Mr. Reitz is completing a masters thesis on the Fort Snelling Agency and Lawrence Taliaferro and agreed to share some of his information with us. /

THENCE TO THE PLOVER PORTAGE by Thomas F. Reitz

The Plover River is not talked about very often these days. When a conversation is struck it usually covers swimming, fishing, irrigation or pollution. In years past the Plover River was a canoe route used by the Chippewa Indians to traverse the expanse of their wilderness land. It was a forest highway connecting this part of the country with the Wisconsin River and the rest of the world. Because of this connection the Plover Portage was a well known landmark and thus established itself in Portage County history.

Many names are familiar to area residents, names such as Marquette, Nicolet, DuBay, and Stevens. Lawrence Taliaferro (Toliver), little known and unheralded in Wisconsin history nonetheless had an important influence on Wisconsin and Portage County. His ancestors were Italian, he was a Virginian & when we meet him in 1836 he was the United States Indian Agent at the St. Peter's Agency. Taliaferro was hard working and dedicated to fulfilling his duties to the United States and to the tribes assigned to his agency.

The St. Peter's Agency was located near Fort Snelling at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Peter's (now Minnesota) Rivers. It is now part of the city of Minneapolis. Taliaferro's original duty included both the Sioux and Chippewa tribes but the immense distances (central Wisconsin to the Dakotas) and the protracted war between the two tribes resulted in the Chippewa being assigned to the Saulte St. Marie Agency under Henry Schoolcraft. This arrangement was never approved by the western Chippewa because of distance and convenience so they never did stop visiting Taliaferro at the St. Peter's Agency.

The election of 1828 provided a new President and a new Indian policy. No longer was mere displacement satisfactory. Official force now threw its weight behind removal of the Native Americans to safety "beyond the Mississippi." Southwestern Wisconsin felt the effect of this policy as early as 1829 when the lead region was acquired. Northern Wisconsin had to wait another eight years for the slow wheels of progress to reach the forests and farm lands familiar to us. Eastern migration, by the mid-1830's was spreading into Wisconsin and Lawrence Taliaferro saw a opportunity to do his duty to government policy.

Early in May, 1836, Taliaferro notified the War Department that the Medawakanton Sioux were ready to sell their land on the east side of the Mississippi River. The sale would suit federal policy and if the government moved quickly it could be had at a good price.¹ Shortly thereafter Wisconsin was organized as a territory and the Territorial Governor, Henry Dodge, became the ex officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs to whom Taliaferro would report, his agency being part of the new territory. Taliaferro wrote to Dodge in September, 1836, informing of his earlier report to the War Department.² Taliaferro's concern was mainly with the Sioux land, approximately 2.8 million acres, along the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River. He describes the area as:

extensive and from the great quantity of lumber which it contains for building and other purposes---would become an important acquisition to Wisconsin and greatly promote the sales of public lands and finally put an end to the vexations consequent from the frequent removals of our citizens from the Pineries(sic).³

Dodge was a frontier entrepreneur and needed little such encouragement to promote such a plan. The idea was not only accepted but was extended to include the Chippewa, Winnebago and Sacs and Foxes.⁴ White encroachment was common and as the white population grew many people believed the only protection for the Native Americans was removal away from the whites and, coincidentally, from their natural resources.

Taliaferro had always taken his duties as protector of the tribes he was assigned to seriously and this attitude came into conflict with the American Fur Company and its agents.

The fur trade had been declining since the early '30's until by 1837 the American Fur Company's Western Outfit showed only one-tenth its usual profit.⁵ A return this small would normally portend hard times, even dissolution of the Company. Officials of the American Fur Company forestalled disaster by exercising their great power over the tribes and in Washington by the simple expedient of having "unpaid debt" claims included in land cession treaties. They also worked very hard and with not a little success to have lump sum payments and annuities paid in specie rather than goods, the tribes could then spend the money at Company stores. The Company was so successful that they collected \$360,000 in four 1837 treaties for debts and paid dividends to the stockholders.⁶

Individual agents of the Company also had to expand their activities to meet changing conditions. One of the most natural areas of expansion for these men was into timber and lumber production. Henry H. Sibley (later Governor of Minnesota), William Aitkens, Lyman Warren and Hercules Douseman all had made agreements with the Chippewa and Sioux for sawmills in the Indian Country.⁷ These agreements were clearly in violation of at least two articles of the Trade and Intercourse Acts.⁸

Another area the Company and its agents could expand into was land speculation. The process for this was to have half-breed claims included in land cession treaties. It was argued that since the half-bloods were half Indian they had a claim to part of the ceded land as a birthright. The Company, or individuals, could then buy up claims at a bargain and speculate when the land opened for the whites. Traders found this an easy argument because many were married to Indian women and had several half-blood children, all with a claim.

To avoid some of these pitfalls Taliaferro had managed to have the Sioux negotiations moved to the city of Washington, far, he hoped, from the influence of the traders. When word went out for a council it went to the Chippewa who were told to meet at Fort Snelling at the end of July, 1837.

The Chippewa started gathering in mid-July and when the negotiations began July 20, 1837 about 1000 Chippewa men, women and children were camped around the Fort. The situation was not without danger. The Sioux and Chippewa had been mortal enemies for many years & this large group of Chippewa in Sioux territory naturally made the Sioux wary. Taliaferro was responsible for maintaining peace and he was careful to keep the two tribes as separate as possible.

Governor Henry Dodge was appointed Treaty Commissioner to represent the United States. The Chippewa were represented by the chiefs and warriors from the Leech Lake, Gull Lake and Swan River, Mille Lac, Snake River, Sandy Lake, Red Cedar Lake, Fond du Lac, Yellow River, Lac Court Oreilles and Lac du Flambeau bands. Two of the most notable men were Flat Mouth and Hole-in-the-Day. Wisconsin River bands were not present and their land was sold without their direct approval. The federal government later recognized the omission by including these bands in annuity payments. The result of this omission was that none of the treaty signers had occupancy of the eastern end of the cession.⁹

The negotiations were opened on July 20, 1837 with an address delivered by Governor Dodge. He stated he was sent to purchase land from them and that the land "... as I am informed is not valuable to you for its game, and not suited to the culture of corn, and other Agricultural (sic) purposes."¹⁰ Dodge hoped to proceed quickly with the negotiations but was immediately delayed by the absence of the Wisconsin bands from the La Pointe sub-agency. These bands arrived July 24, 1837 with their sub-agent Daniel Bushnell and their trader Lyman Warren but deferred business another day. In the meantime Dodge had listened to requests for better provisions, whiskey, presents and generosity for the half-bloods and traders.¹¹ Shortly after his arrival Warren, worried about the timber deal in which he was involved, stirred up a group of Pillager Chippewa and headed for the council area. They forced their way into the council with shouts and demanded that Dodge recognize, in the treaty, exemption for his agreement with the Chippewa or a cash settlement to cover his losses. This display was successful. Article 4 of the treaty allocated

\$25,000 to Warren, \$28,000 to William Aitkens and incredibly \$5,000 to Hercules Douseman for a sawmill that served the Sioux.¹²

Serious negotiation began on Wednesday July 26, 1837 with Dodge outlining the boundaries on a map and asking the Chippewa if they wished to sell and if so to return with a price and terms on Thursday. Dodge had received direct assurances the sale would be completed but was not certain of Chippewa terms.¹³

The terms the Chippewa returned with on July 27, 1837 mainly reflected their concern with retaining their right to hunt, fish, and gather rice and maple sugar on the ceded land. They further asked for a sixty year annuity and land for their half-blood relatives. The Chippewa then agreed to sell their land but could not decide on a price. Dodge replied by telling them to ask their "two Fathers," sub-agents Bushnell and Miles Vineyard, for advice on a price for their land. He then stated they could hunt and fish on the land as long as the President allowed but it would no longer be their land. He continued by saying the half-bloods would get money not land and that half the sale price should be in goods. The meeting was then adjourned and the Chippewa withdrew to confer.¹⁴

The council proceeded on July 28, 1837 with the Chippewa reiterating their wish to retain foraging rights and to remain in the country to live. They still had not decided on a sale price. Commissioner Dodge responded by saying he would ask the President about collecting maple sugar and rice but he was sure they could hunt and fish on the ceded land "during his [the Presidents] pleasure." That is not the sense of meaning understood from the Chippewa statement but that is how the treaty was written. Dodge then presented the government's offer of \$700,000 to be paid in a down payment and a twenty year annuity with specific amounts listed for payment in specie, goods, provisions, smiths, teachers, and millers. The traders would receive \$70,000 for "unpaid debts" and the half-bloods would receive from the Chippewa nation a donation of \$100,000. The full cost to the United States, with the special sawmill claims, amounted to \$828,000.

Flat Mouth angrily denied the "unpaid debts"

since many of the debtors might be dead, many had been killed while trapping furs. He argued that the traders had lived on Chippewa land, had eaten their animals and fish and had used their wood and thus had no claim against the Chippewa. He also argued the annuity should be forever. Since the land supplies their living what will they live on when the annuity runs out? Dodge replied he had made his offer and they must either accept or reject it and the meeting was adjourned.¹⁵

The Chippewa returned and accepted the terms the next day, Saturday July 29, 1837. The United States added all or part of twenty-six counties to present day Wisconsin including about one-third of Portage County. The eastern boundary of the ceded land followed the line that separated the Chippewa and Menominee tribes in a southerly direction "thence to the Plover Portage."¹⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. Lawrence Taliaferro to War Department, May 15, 1836, Lawrence Taliaferro Papers. Microfilm copy in UW-Stevens Point of original in Minnesota Historical Society.
2. Lawrence Taliaferro to Governor Dodge, September 2, 1836, Taliaferro Papers.
3. Lawrence Taliaferro to C.A. Harris, November 30, 1836, Taliaferro Papers.
4. John Porter Bloom, ed., The Territorial Papers of the United States, 28 vols. (Washington: National Archives, 1969), vol. 27: Wisconsin Territory, p. 694. Delegate Jones to Senator Robert J. Walker, December 27, 1836.
5. Evan Jones, Citadel in the Wilderness: The Story of Fort Snelling and the Old Northwest Frontier, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), p. 195.
6. Alice E. Smith, The History of Wisconsin, vol. 1: From Exploration to Statehood (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973), p. 504.

FOOTNOTES cont.

7. Jones, Citadel, p. 191. : Willaim W. Folwell, A History of Minnesota, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1956), p. 159.
8. Francis Paul Prucha, American Indian Policy in the Formative Years, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1962), pp. 144-145.
9. Harold Hickerson, Chippewa 4: Ethnohistory of Chippewa in Central Minnesota, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), p.25:p. 197.
10. U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Documents Relating to the Negotiation of Ratified and Unratified Treaties With Various Indian Tribes, 1801-1869, Record Group 75, V.P. Van Antwerp's Report, p.2.
11. Ibid. pp. 10-12.
12. Jones, Citadel, pp. 193-194.: Charles J. Kappler, comp., Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, vol. 2, Treaties (Washington, 1904), pp. 491-493.
13. Documents Relating, p. 15: p. 18.
14. Ibid. pp. 20-24.
15. Ibid. pp. 27-30.
16. Kappler, Treaties, p. 491.

FEATURE
LOST HOUSES OF PORTAGE COUNTY
By Wendell Nelson

The Blake-Mitchell House on Clark Street

Though it has been gone for over thirty-five years, the Blake-Mitchell house is still remembered by older local residents as one of the most imposing houses in Stevens Point. Indeed, for many years after it was built in 1874, it was the undisputed queen of Clark Street's many fine houses.

Part of that distinction was due to the commanding position of the house at the top of what was then called Phillips' Hill, where the Trinity Lutheran Church parish house is today. The hill was probably named for Dr. John Phillips, whose house was one of the early ones in that block of Clark Street. According to Mrs. Win Rothman, the hill was much steeper originally than it is now, but was cut down.¹

Exactly when that cut was made is unclear, but a Stevens Point Daily Journal article from July 15, 1899, suggests that it was made not long before that date: "W.W. Mitchell is having a new cement walk laid in front of his residence on the hill. When his terrace is complete he will have one of the handsomest residence lots in the city. All property holders on the street except Dr. John Phillips have now relaid their walks to conform to the grade."²

Another Daily Journal article, from two months later, adds details about further improvements. "W.W. Mitchell is having his residence lot on Clark street nicely terraced and sodded. A.C. Councilman is doing the work."³

Younger residents who may wonder what the hill looked like before the grading, need only look at the height of the yards and retaining walls in front of the remaining houses in the 1400 and 1500 blocks of Clark Street. Mrs. Rothman says that the city simply cut the street down,

leaving homeowners to worry about the erosion and wounded appearance of their lawns.⁴ Most put up retaining walls of cement or stone. For example, W.B. Buckingham had one put in for his yard, at the house that is now numbered 1424. Giving us further evidence that the grading was done in 1899, the Daily Journal reported that he "will not terrace his lawn on Clark street as the other property holders are doing but will put up a retaining wall of irregular shaped stone."⁵

There is no mystery about when the Blake-Mitchell house was built. Four articles from the 1874 Journal show clearly that it was built in that year. The May 9 issue announces: "Mr. Blake is to put up a three thousand dollar residence on the lot occupied by his present house. The latter is to be moved off next week, and work on the new one will commence immediately thereafter."⁶

The other three articles give us more details and also raise the cost by \$1000. The July 5 Journal recorded that "The residence being built by Mr. Blake on Clark Street is progressing finely, and will be one of the finest residences in the city. It is being veniered /sic / with Watertown brick, and will cost about \$4,000."⁷

"Mr. Blake's handsome residence on Clark Street is nearly completed, and we are told will cost about \$4,000," said the September 12 issue. "These two houses /the other was Alexander Krembs, Sr's., built in the same year at the corner of Union and Main streets, where the Ben Franklin store is now / are the most expensive and largest ones ever built in the city, but we expect that several of our capitalists will be turning their attention in that direction soon, and possibly by another summer."⁸

The last article, from the October 24 Journal, gives us our only clue about the size of the house. "Mr. Blake's handsome and substantial residence will be completed in about a week. It has twenty rooms, and will cost nearly \$4,000."⁹

The tax rolls substantiate the Journal's evidence. The entry for 1874 shows a value of \$600 for the two lots. But the lots rose to \$2000 in value by the next year, which implies that some major improvement was made

to the property in 1874, especially when the entries for surrounding blocks and lots show no general increase in valuation.¹⁰

We cannot include a picture here, so readers who were born or who moved to the city after 1941 may wonder what the house looked like. It was built, if we may judge from the only extant picture of it, in the shape of a cross, with the longer arms of the main part running east and west along Clark Street and the shorter parts north and south.¹¹ Each outside wall had a gable, therefore. The first floor on the front was adorned, as the old newspapers would say, with a bay window on each side of the center front door. Typical of its Italianate style were the heavy moldings (of extra bricks, in this case) over the windows, but the chimneys at both ends of the main part were a holdover from the earlier Federal Style. The final touch was the large octagonal cupola that sat in the middle of the roof, atop the intersection of the ridgepoles of the two members of the cross. The picture shows no brackets under the wide eaves, but they might have been there at one time, because they, too, were a feature of Italianate architecture.

A year and a half after he moved into the house, Blake "...further beautified the commodious grounds surrounding his fine residence, by building a neat picket fence on the Ellis street front," in 1876.¹²

The house was razed in early 1941, apparently but it had not stood for those sixty-seven years unscathed. In 1882, for example, it was hit by lightning. The Gazette of June 21 reported that "Three houses were struck by the single flash, the three points forming a triangle probably three blocks apart. At the RESIDENCE OF N. BLAKE, On/sic Clark street, the bolt was light and, very little damage /was / done, the electric fluid entering the cupola, and passing into the second story, when it disappeared, no trace of its egress being found. As the family were all on the first floor no damage was done beyond tearing the plastering, filling the house with smoke, and giving the inmates a slight shock."¹³

The house was also a victim of the notorious cyclone of 1908, which destroyed many buildings in the city. It hit on

November 25, 1908, and the Gazette of December 2 described the damage to the Mitchell house: "Several residences on Clark street suffered considerable loss, chimneys on the W.W. Mitchell home being blown off, his ice house was wrecked, a small storehouse unroofed, and a number of shade trees ruined." 14

As if this damage was not enough, a fire broke out in the house only two weeks later. "At about 9 o'clock last Wednesday evening, as John W. Clifford was on his way to his home at the corner of Clark and Division streets... he noticed a fire on the roof of the residence of W.W. Mitchell. He quickly informed Mrs. Mitchell, Mr. Mitchell being down town at the time, and an alarm was turned in. The fire department responded promptly, but as the fire had broken out in the attic, it proved to be quite difficult to get out and was not entirely extinguished until after midnight."

"The house is equipped with a hot water heating system, but during mild weather a stove is used in the sitting room, and after starting a fire in the stove that morning, the soot [sic] in the chimney caught fire and burned for quite a time. The chimney was watched during the day, as the top had been blown off and otherwise damaged during the recent tornado, and Mrs. Mitchell went up stairs to investigate only a few minutes before the fire was discovered. It had evidently started in the joist around the chimney near the second story ceiling, having probably been smouldering throughout the day, and when the fire finally broke out, it spread rapidly to the adjoining woodwork, including a large cupola upon the roof. The department had three streams of water playing upon the fire and as a consequence the interior of the spacious residence was baldy [sic] water soaked and many valuable books, magazines and other articles, including files of the Gazette from its first issue in 1878, the Journal and Wisconsin Pinery. The residence and the barn on the premises were insured for \$3,700, which will probably cover the loss." 15

The house was apparently repaired, because it stood for another thirty-three years. The 1940 picture shows it looking in fairly good condition, despite its age and the evident neglect it had suffered in its last years.

One refurbishing was done "in about 1921." James Malick, 2049 Oak Street, Stevens Point, remembers helping his father paint the tin roof of the Mitchell house. The difficulties that they encountered give us some idea of the size and design of the house.

"We had to think a long time to find a way to stay on that slippery roof. Finally we found a way. We tied a rope around my waist and tied the other end around one of the chimneys; that way, I could fall only a couple of feet. Then we stood the ladder on the roof, so that its legs straddled the peak, and tied the other end to the cupola, opening the windows and running the rope through one and back out another. That was to enable us to paint the roof of the cupola. (There were window seats --kind of a bench--running all around the inside of the cupola.)" 16

The Blake-Mitchell families were the only occupants of the house for nearly all its life, except for some of the years after Mrs. Mitchell's death in 1933, and except for three years in the 1880's. On January 3, 1883, Nathan Blake and his wife went to San Jose, California, apparently for his health, and the Mitchells joined them in the spring of the same year. The Blakes stayed there until September, 1886, but the Mitchells returned about a year earlier.¹⁷ (Readers who wonder about the connection between the two families should know that the Blakes' only child, Clara, married W.W. Mitchell. They will all be discussed in more detail in the next article in this series.)

While they were all in California, they rented the house out. Four of the tenants (they seem to have been the only ones, but we cannot be sure of that) were "W.W. Haseltine and wife and F.G. Kirwan and wife." The Gazette of August 29, 1883, reported that they "...now occupy the N. Blake brick residence on Clark street, one of the finest residences in the city." 18

Nathan Blake died in 1891, his wife in 1908, and W.W. Mitchell in 1927. Mrs. Mitchell lived in the house with her

niece, Belle (Clara Belle) Mitchell, and her maid, Martha Kling, until she died in 1933. Mrs. Mitchell was one of the charter members of the Stevens Point chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and was its regent (president) for the last thirty-one years of her life. Because of this office that she held, the local chapter always met in a special "front room of her residence [that] was dedicated, by time and usage, to the chapter." That room, says her obituary in the November 20, 1933, Daily Journal, contained "...the chapter's library of several hundred volumes, including nearly all of the more than 100 published volumes of lineage books of the order."

Mrs. Mitchell's will stipulated that the house should "remain intact so long as Belle Mitchell and Martha Kling desire to occupy the same," but that "upon abandonment of such property by the said Belle Mitchell or Martha Kling or upon the death of either, I authorize the said trustee W.E. Atwell ...to convey said property to the city of Stevens Point for park purposes, to be known as 'Blake-Mitchell Memorial Park.'"¹⁹

So Stevens Point could have had a splendid city park consisting of eight lots bound by Clark, Ellis, and Rogers streets, with the house left to be used as a museum. But the city "declined" the offer, apparently because no funds were left with it to maintain the property, according to Mrs. Rothman, and the house was razed in late 1940 or early 1941. The Daily Journal of December 20, 1940, announced that the house "is to be razed," and the tax rolls for the property show the usual full value (\$3000) for the improvements on the land for 1940, but show a value of only \$200 for 1941, and a blank in the "Improvements" column for 1942.

How long Belle Mitchell and Martha Kling lived in the house after 1933 is a mystery at the moment. The December 20, 1940, Daily Journal noted that the "...home was occupied until recently," but how recently is unclear. Mrs. Rothman recalls that Belle lived at the Majestic Hotel for a while, and later lived in the Portage County Home, but we still do not know when she left the house.

Moreover, the stipulation that the property

would become the city's after Belle's death is irrelevant. She died at the "Portage County Infirmary" on March 14, 1962, over twenty years after the house was destroyed.

What became of Martha Kling is even more unclear. The county death records list no one by that name as dying in the county, so she must have moved away sometime after late 1933.²⁰

At any rate, the house was not well-cared for in its last years. The tax rolls show that W.E. Atwell paid the taxes from 1933 until 1937, but they were unpaid and "returned delinquent" in 1938. They were paid for all the following years, but for 1934, 1935, 1936, 1938, and 1939, a special assessment was levied on the estate for "S & I REM. & WEEDS" (snow and ice removal, and weed cutting), implying that the yard was not maintained for those years. And Mrs. Rothman remembers that in later years, bushes and vines nearly covered the outside walls of the house, obscuring its features, and lending it a melancholy, haunted air.

The rest of the history of the house is anticlimactic. Robert Breitenstein bought the property in 1942, according to the tax rolls, and kept the lot vacant for eight years. Then, in 1950, if we judge from the rolls, he began building an apartment house on the site of the mansion, and finished it in 1951. The value for the improvements on the property is given as \$10,900 in 1951, and \$47,025 in 1952.²¹

The two lots where the mansion stood were bought by Trinity Lutheran Church in 1961, according to the City Assessor's Office. The church still owns the former apartment building, and uses it for Sunday School classes and other church-related activities?

So nothing is left of the fine old Blake-Mitchell house but a faded newspaper photograph and the memories of older citizens of Stevens Point. And one of those memories, told me by someone whom I do not remember now, is a grotesque image and commentary on a city and society that had

not yet learned to respect and value their past. That person said that he remembered watching the workmen tearing down the house; when most of the walls and doorways were leveled, the splendid, ornate staircase towered, alone, stark, and leading nowhere, amid the ruins, the last part of the structure to stand.

NEXT: The Blake-Mitchell Families.

ENDNOTES

1. Mrs. Win Rothman, 1328 Briggs Street, Stevens Point, telephone conversation with author on July 7, 1978.
2. The qualified phrase "one of the handsomest" is typical rhetoric for 19th-century Wisconsin newspapers; it praises without offending other owners of fine houses and yards. Also, one wonders why Dr. Phillips was the last owner to make the changes.
3. Stevens Point Daily Journal, (September 8, 1899).
4. Rothman, July 7, 1978.
5. Stevens Point Daily Journal (August 16, 1899).
6. When the older house was built, who built it (first owner), where it was moved to, and whether it still stands, are all mysteries; the tax rolls before 1874 for the property are incomplete.
7. Watertown brick, at least in this case, was a cream-colored brick like Milwaukee Cream Brick. This house is the only one I know of so far in the county to be built of Watertown brick.
8. These cost figures are suspect. No doubt the house was very expensive for its day, but the variation of \$1000 makes one wonder exactly how much it did cost. Moreover, both the new owner and the newspaper had a vested interest in making the house seem as costly as possible; a large sum expended reflected well upon the man, who was obviously successful in his business (financially, at least) and did not mind bragging about it, and upon the paper, which loved to show that the city was prospering à la 19th-century notions of progress. The only way to prove the cost of the house would be to find the original receipts for construction costs, or the contract--if there was one.
9. Note, again, the sum of \$4000, and especially the word "nearly"; it covers a magnitude of sins.
10. Portage County Tax Rolls for Stevens Point, Wisconsin (first Ward, A.G.Ellis Addition, Lots 11 & 12), 1874 and 1875.
11. Photograph of Blake-Mitchell house, Stevens Point Daily Journal, XLVI (December 20, 1940), page 11.
12. Stevens Point Journal (May 13, 1876). This article adds: "He has also improved the appearance of his tenement house on Ellis street in the same way." Is this tenement house--rental property--the original house on the site, that was moved off in 1874?
13. "Lightning's Freaks," Portage County Gazette (June 21, 1882).
14. "Tornado Reaps Desolation," Portage County Gazette, XXXI, # 21 (December 2, 1908), page 1.
15. "Fires Do Much Damage," Portage County Gazette, XXXI, # 23 (December 16, 1908), page 6. When was the "hot water heating system" added?
16. James Malick, 2049 Oak Street, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, conversation with author at St. Michael's Hospital on May 10, 1978.
17. Gazette (January 3, 1883; September 8, 1886; September 15, 1886; October 28, 1891)
18. Some readers may recall that W.W. Haseltine was murdered by one of the notorious Curran brothers in April of 1888, in one of Stevens Point's most sensational crimes. Frank Kirwan was the first owner (after his father-in-law Matthew Wadleigh built it for him) of the house that was later known as the Fritz Krembs house, on Main Street, where Bob's Food King is today

He apparently lived in the Mitchell house while his own house was abuilding (no pun intended) in 1884 and 1885.

19. "Mitchell Home Eventually to be City Park," Stevens Point Daily Journal, XXXIX (November 24, 1933), page 1.

20. Portage County Office of Registrar of Deeds, telephone conversation with author on July 7, 1978. Stevens Point Daily Journal (March 14, 1962).

21. Portage County Tax Rolls.

22. Stevens Point City Assessor's Office, telephone conversation with author on June 23, 1978.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Readers are encouraged to submit articles (or historical tid-bits) to The Pinery for possible publication; or to just write to the Editor expressing their feelings about the newsletter. Articles submitted will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Please send all correspondence to:

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We look forward to hearing from you.

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