



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.

Feb. 20 -- Tuesday. 7:30 p.m. John Moore (UWSP Anthropology Dept) will speak on Indian Archeology in Portage County. Check Stevens Point Journal for place.

Mar. 14 -- Wednesday. County Meeting. Check Stevens Point Journal for details.

Apr. 18 -- Wednesday. 7:30 p.m. GENERAL MEETING. Also, Wendell Nelson will present slides of old hotels of Portage County. Check Journal for location.

ROTHMAN TRIBUTE

Editor's Note: The following is a tribute that should have been given on September 2, 1978, when some members of the Board of Directors of the Portage County Historical Society took Mrs. Win Rothman out to eat, in honor of her 91st birthday, to The Restaurant, in the Sentry World Headquarters building. It was not given because, notwithstanding the virtues of his subject, the author did not wish to be a kind of singalong piano-bar player to all the other diners.

91 GOING ON 101: A Tribute to Mrs. Win Rothman
(An undelivered speech yearning to be heard)
by Wendell Nelson

As the involuntary organizer of this event, I

welcome you to this luncheon (as they say in the society columns) in honor of Mrs. Win Rothman's 91st birthday. It should have been in honor of her 90th, but it took us over a year to get organized.

Now, why are we here? I feel like the drunk who entered the elevator and, finding it full, faced the crowd as the doors closed and said, "I suppose you're wondering why I called this meeting."

We could have stayed home, and sent Mrs. Rothman a birthday card. Some of us probably did; I forgot. (If we'd waited to all get together to send it, it would have been even slower than the Postal Service.)

But if we had merely sent her a card, we would not have had this good meal and all our own scintillating company to enjoy. Also, we would not have enjoyed Mrs. Rothman's own company in person.

Moreover, I have gotten into the habit of writing eulogies for old friends who have historical connections in the county. But now I would like to give a tribute to someone who is still around to hear what I have to say about him or her. (That may not be such a good idea, of course; now she can tell me what she thinks of what I say.)

Most important, if we simply sent her a card, we might not make clear in our minds why we remember her birthday at all. So, now that we are here, why do we?

First, anyone who lives to be 91 years old deserves some recognition for health, temperate living, endurance, or simply a stubborn refusal to leave. That person must have some secret that we all could use.

But Mrs. Rothman is not just any 91-year-old. Even though she is already in a very select group, she is special, she is unique. So she deserves this recognition for more personal reasons.

First, we are all connected with the Portage County Historical Society, and we all know her contributions to history in this county. She comes from a very old Yankee family, old in this country and old in Portage County. She has, as it is now popular to say, deep roots in this area.

Benjamin Burr, her grandfather, came to the county in 1856, according to her reliable information, liked what he saw, returned to the East to sell his property, and moved here to stay. Once he got here, he prospered and became one of the county's most influential men. During his life, according to the Gazette of February 17, 1894, and Mrs. Rothman's own notes, he was the owner of (and partner in) various mercantile businesses, the largest stockholder of the Commercial Bank and the first president of the International Bank of Amherst, an Assemblyman for one term (1868), school-board member, alderman, and county board chairman.

But her contributions to our history took a more active form, too. She is a charter member of the Portage County Historical Society; she was present at the first informational and organizational meetings in the 1920's, and she remembers them well. She served on the society's Board of Directors for many years, and is still a member of the society itself.

Outside the formal society, and since she retired from it, she has been a priceless reservoir of historical information for scholars like me. She always willingly--even eagerly--shares her knowledge, but always with the caution that we should check it; she is as demanding of herself as she is of others in wanting accuracy in recording the past.

For she no romantic about the past, partly because she lived it, and partly because she has read, with her indefatigable mind, many books of history on a broader and older scale. She has read, that is to say, history written by great professional historians about the large events of the past, and wants local

history to come up to the same standards. She is far more than just another older person who remembers the past.

Those memories of the past, which she shares so willingly, are the very stuff of history (or should be); indeed, they are the very stuff of life. They are detailed, personal, and full of life. She remembers what someone said fifty years ago, what someone was fond of wearing to every occasion no matter how tired other people were of the garment, and what someone's face looked like, with all its human beauties and imperfections. In a sentence, she can breathe more life into a person long dead than can a volume of obituaries or even an album of photographs.

(I know how precious those memories are. About once a month, I call Mrs. Rothman to share some tidbits of the past from old newspapers, or to ask her where such-and-such a building stood, or what she remembers of the Blank family. Invariably, these brief questions lead to a half hour of her memories of these buildings and persons and others--we ramble, and cover the whole county and a century or more of its history--much to the detriment of my phone bill. But I always come away from such chats pleased, because I know that I have garnered--I write furiously as she dictates, as it were--another sheaf of priceless memories that no one else can give me, or at least not as well).

Her memories have another special quality that raises them above those of some other people. They have what one critic said that Willa Cather had--the "gift of sympathy." Mrs. Rothman is too honest to omit unpleasant memories or unflattering details about people of the past. But she always tells them not with a relish or a prissy reluctance, but with a kind of sad understanding. For she has lived long enough to see many people act out their lives, some wisely, many foolishly; some successfully (in any sense of the word), and some with tragic failure; some who seemed to do only acts of kindness, and some with only meanness (pun intended) to live after them.

But she tells of these people with the real gift of sympathy. She understands that life sometimes causes people to act strangely and not always wisely, honestly, or generously.

She does not condemn, and is not bitter even about some who harmed her family long ago. At the risk of romanticizing her-- she would not want that--she seems like an island of strength and understanding in a sea of foibles; she seems to be above or at least apart from the turmoil of life, in the sanctuary of her quiet, timeless living room.

For there is about Mrs. Rothman herself a sense of the timeless. She seems to me, a newcomer to the county, to have always been, and I cannot believe that she will not always be. This seems true not only because she is 91 years old and has her roots, her life, in part in another century. It is also true because, as I said, she has read widely in the literature and history of the world and seems therefore to partake of the universal. To hear her recite from memory, from Scott's The Lady of the Lake,

The stag at eve
had drunk his fill,
Where danced the moon
on Monan's rill....

is to feel the sweep of the romantic lines but also the thrill of even more ghosts of the past. (And I realize, with some regret, what recent generations have lost by their neglect of old classics of literature, and of, horror of horrors, memorization of fine poetry.)

But it is true for another reason. Because of her family's wealth in the early days of Stevens Point, she was given not only material advantages but an upbringing that was civilized not only in the sense of being refined. True, she grew up among fine silver, china, furniture, and clothing. But she also learned certain civilized values that taught her how to behave in various situations, and how to use her mind in reading and thinking about the great thoughts of humanity. But, as I implied in describing her memories of early county people, that civilization never isolated her from people, rich or poor. Her family's sudden, shattering loss of most of their property in the years following the collapse of the Commercial Bank in 1894, taught her a lesson in the shifting fortunes of life and a greater lesson in sympathy for and judgement of people by their internal worth, not their external trappings.

In short, Mrs. Rothman is the most highly civilized person I know; she is literate, thinking, refined, compassionate, sensitive, and tactful. These to me are most of the timeless traits of any cultured, civilized person anywhere, the best virtues of any civilization, and they are a real comfort in an age of sanctioned barbarity.

One other way in which she is timeless is in her personal agelessness. Though I have heard her quote that "growing old is hell," she never seems to show it. She always looks nice, for example; her hair is always freshly fixed, and she is always nicely dressed.

More important, she has never let her mind grow stagnant. She still loves to read books, magazines, and newspapers, even when her eyes do not cooperate (and then she uses talking books on records). She watches news programs on television (especially educational television); so she not only stays informed on current events, but enjoys discussing them.

She has kept an open mind, a curiosity, and an eagerness to learn about new subjects and ideas. For example, when one of her grandsons married a Jewish girl, Mrs. Rothman embarked on a study of Judaism and Jewish history. She reminds me of 92-year-old Justice Oliver Wendell (no relation) Holmes' reply to Franklin D. Roosevelt when the newly inaugurated president paid the old man a call in 1933. Roosevelt "found Holmes in his library, reading Plato. The question rose irresistibly. 'Why do you read Plato, Mr. Justice?'

"'To improve my mind, Mr. President,' Holmes replied."

Mrs. Rothman has never lost her sense of humor, even after early family tragedies and after the death of her beloved husband. She has a quiet, refined humor at times, one that delights in puns and other turns of language. But she also can burst out in a rollicking laugh at the ridiculous in life, and she can laugh at herself as well--perhaps the most obviously healthy trait in her humor.

So she is more alive than many people half her age, and she teaches us by her example to keep our interest in life as we age, contrary to all that our youth-obsessed culture would have us believe.

Mrs. Rothman once wondered aloud to me why,

given her physical infirmities, she has been allowed to live so long. (She has had numerous illnesses, operations, and extended convalescences, but then so did Mr. Rothman, and they both rebounded un-daunted from them; when he told me that he had had a heart attack many years before, I expressed surprise. He replied with a smile, "Hasn't everybody?")

My reply to her question is always that she is of inestimable good to all of us and many others--in all the ways I have mentioned. I cannot imagine life in Portage County without Mrs. Rothman. Even though we don't see her as often as we'd like, just knowing that she is here with us is reassuring; the world seems in order then. Her cool, dark living room with its books, old furniture and pleasantly old smells, is still there in her charming old house on Briggs Street as a refuge from our busy lives. And she is still here, a living counterpart to her house, to show us some permanent values from the past in a changing world.

1. Catherine Drinker Bowen, Yankee from Olympus: Justice Holmes and His Family (Boston, Little, Brown, 1944), page 414.

WISCONSIN WAY BACK WHEN

Readers may be interested in a soft-cover book recently published by Tamarack Press (the book division of Wisconsin Trails Magazine) entitled **YARNS OF WISCONSIN** (\$6.95). According to the press release YARNS consists of "stories and reminiscences about turn-of-the-century life in Wisconsin". In the book, "over 40 writers tell tall tales, remember their childhoods, and help to recreate the times 'way back then'...when the world was a smaller, saner place. It was a world filled with gypsies and raga-muffins and rough-and-tumble lumberjacks, steamboats and clippers, old-time deer camps and one-room schoolhouses, lavender sachets and antimacassars, hand-cranked telephones, hot air ballons, and White Eagle Speedsters." Copies are available at bookstores or from the publisher, Tamarack Press, P.O. Box 5650, Madison, Wi 53705

Perhaps some of our readers have some "tall tales" and reminiscences of their own they would like to share in the Pinery. If so, please submit them to the editor.

The Pinery is the official newsletter of the Portage County Historical Society, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

William G. Paul, Editor

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CLIO'S CORNER

Editor's Note: The following is reprinted from Badger Postal History (Feb, May 1964) through the Courtesy of the Wisconsin Postal History Society.

THE FIRST DECADE OF PORTAGE COUNTY

by George Crowell

Portage County, formed in 1836 from part of Brown County which included the great portage connecting the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers, initially extended northward for more than 100 miles. Its boundaries were changed several times. In 1844 Columbia County was organized, from a region that included the great portage. By 1845 Portage County contained today's Marathon, Portage, Wood and Adams Counties.

The postal history of Portage County got a start with establishment of three post offices on January 14, 1845 -- the only post offices in the Pinery Region of the Wisconsin River in Wisconsin Territory. Early stage routes brought the mail from Gill's Landing on the Wolf River, Berlin on the Fox, and New Lisbon.

1. Point Bas (sometimes listed as Point Baussee) across the Wisconsin from present Nekoosa, took the site of the Indian village where Chief Oshkosh was born in 1795. Here an early trading post was set up and in 1831 Whitney's sawmill, one of the first on the Wisconsin River. Robert Wakely was the only postmaster Point Bas ever had. He served until the office was discontinued January 17, 1850. No Point Bas markings or covers are recorded.

2. A few miles upstream was Grand Rapids which later joined its twin city of Centralia. In the 1920's it became Wisconsin Rapids. E.S. Miner, the first postmaster, served until December 12, 1850. John Werner came next. Then on August 5, 1854 came Eusebius Savigne, who held the office some while after Wood County was set off from Portage, on March 29, 1856. Early postal history material from Grand Rapids survives, including a fine PAID-3 of the year 1855.

3. Plover Portage, officially shortened to Plover in 1850, was some 25 miles up-

stream. It still is there, just south of Stevens Point. Plover was the first seat of Portage County, which is hard to believe when one looks at it now. George Wyatt was its first postmaster. Following the first county election, in autumn of 1844, he became Clerk of Court, Clerk of the County Board, as well as Register of Deeds!

Second postmaster of Plover Portage was James S. Alban. He took office Sept. 19, 1845. A lawyer, he came from Jefferson County, Ohio, in 1844 and became judge. Alban commanded 18th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry and was killed at the Battle of Shiloh, April 6, 1862. Eight other postmasters served this office in the decade ending 1854.

Seven post offices followed Plover Portage in the county's first decade. Their dates and first postmasters were:

Shaurette	9-18-49	John Strong
Stevens Point	12-12-49	William Griffen
Almond	7-8-50	James F. Moore
Buena Vista	9-25-50	Wellington Kollock
Eau Pleine	4-1-51	John B. Dubay
Lake Sarah	10-1-52	Cyrus D. McCaughey
Iron Creek	12-22-54	Shubel Lewis

Stevens Point and Almond remain the only offices in continuous service to today. Shaurette (disc. 2-6-1850) probably was near to present-day Whiting. The Buena Vista post office (disc. 1900) was at Liberty Corners; James F. Moore, Almond's first postmaster, was Buena Vista postmaster during the Civil War. Lake Sarah (disc. 5-26-1854) was on the Buena Vista and Plover stage route. On the Hancock-Grand Rapids stage route was Iron Creek post office (disc. 5-19-1857), probably situated in the town of Pine Grove.

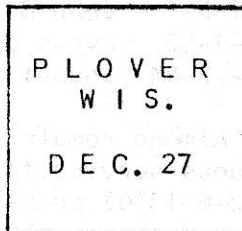
Eau Pleine post office (disc. 5-26-1853) was at Dubay's Trading Post. John Dubay, who served until 5-26-1853, was certainly one of the colorful postmasters of early Portage County. About 1790, Louis Dubay of Montreal, father of John, had spent the winter, and set up the trading post on the Wisconsin River a few miles above the present site of Stevens Point. John

was born in Green Bay in 1810. Gov. Cass commissioned him lieutenant colonel, and he served briefly in the Black Hawk War that was fought in the summer of 1832. John Dubay married one of the daughters of Chief Oshkosh. John spoke the Indian language, served Cass as an interpreter. John Dubay was instrumental in laying out the road from Madison to Wausau, and was prominent in early county affairs.

Portage County again lost area, as other counties were set off from it: Adams on March 11, 1848; Marathon in early 1850.

Letters from early Portage County medical men have come to light. The first to practice in the county, in 1846, was Dr. John Bristol; he died at Plover Portage in 1848. Dr. John Phillips settled at Stevens Point in 1848.

The earliest known handstamp -- as distinct from manuscript -- postal marking from Portage County is the straight line box from Plover, the county seat (see below). This was in use in late territorial time and continued in use up to 1851.



STEVENS POINT BREWERS OF THE PAST

/ Editor's Note: The following article was prepared by John Stastny - former Assistant Editor of the Pinery. John is currently living in New Lisbon and is employed as a City Clerk. /

Point Special Beer, brewed by the Stevens Point Beverage Company, has received a great deal of notoriety in recent years. The Point brewery is built on the oldest brewery foundation in Stevens Point. It was not without local competition however.

In 1857, George Ruder and Frank Wahle

were brewing beer on the site of the Point brewery. Their operation continued, expanded and changed hands through the years. In 1859, Ruder moved to Wausau where he set up a brewery. Wahle sold the brewery to Andrew and Jacob Lutz in 1867. The Lutz family ran the brewery until they sold it to Gustav Kuenzel in 1897. Kuenzel organized the Gustav Kuenzel Brewing Company in 1901. It was reorganized as the Stevens Point Brewing Company the following year. During prohibition, in 1924, Ludwig Korfmann purchased controlling interest and reorganized the company as the Stevens Point Beverage Company, which remains in operation today under Felix and Ken Shibilski.

Through its history, this brewery was not without local competition. Adam Kuhl, a cabinet-maker, began brewing beer in 1866 in a brewery on the corner of Brown (now College Avenue) and Prentice Streets. Kuhl was an effective competitor. At the time of his death, in 1883, he was producing between six and seven hundred barrels of beer a year. The Kuhl family continued to run the brewery until they leased it to George Ellenberger in 1885. Ellenberger ran a brewing operation in the Kuhl brewery until 1888 when he built his own brewery on Michigan Avenue (between Jefferson and Center Streets). The Ellenberger brewery operated until 1892 when it became unprofitable. Ellenberger then went to work in the Lutz brewery where he remained until shortly before his death in 1906. The Michigan Avenue brewery was run for a short time by Neuberger and Ritter in 1895.

The Kuhl family again operated the brewery under the management of Kuhl's son-in-law, Stanley E. Kellar. Kellar operated the Kuhl brewery until 1892. In that year, fire destroyed the brewery. Christina Kuhl, matriarch of the Kuhl brewing and real estate empire, chose not to rebuild the brewery. The Kuhl family turned to merchantile pursuits.

Shortly after Ellenberger ceased brewing operations, Frank Michalski began refitting a brewery (possibly the Ellenberger brewery, although this is not clear from the sources). Michalski's efforts ended in a fire in 1895

which destroyed the brick veneer brewery, two ice houses and a barn, as well as damaging a residence according to the Stevens Point Journal (29 June 1895, p. 5, col. 7). This brewery was known as the Central City Brewery, according to both the Journal and the Portage County Gazette (3 July 1895, P. 1, col. 3) reports of the fire. Michalski returned to his saloon business, on the square, until his death about a year later.

Shortly after the Central City Brewery fire, H. L. Barkowsky operated a bottling plant at 309 Main Street, just off the square (recently this was Pasternacki's Clothing Store). Little information is available about this operation except that Barkowsky had bottles with his name in raised glass on the side. These were bottles of clear glass, manufactured by Streator Glass and Bottle Company of Streator, Illinois. They were very rare according to bottle collector Wayne Kroll in his book, Badger Breweries, Past and Present.

The most recent local competition for the Point Brewery was the Polish Brewery, which began operations before 1908 (their plant suffered severe damages in the cyclone of November 25, 1908). The company was reorganized in 1914 as the National Brewing Company. It went out of business about 1920 when many breweries closed completely due to prohibition.

So it was that Stevens Point was an area with many brewers in the early years. **Of them, the Stevens Point Beverage Company** remains. The others passed into the memory of the days when teams of horses pulled brewery delivery wagons through the streets to local "watering holes" on the square and elsewhere.

This article was written using the Stevens Point Journal, Portage County Gazette, Wayne Kroll's Badger Breweries Past and Present (1976), John Stastny's A History of the Stevens Point Beverage Company (Masters Thesis-UWSP 1976), and Elizabeth A. Temple's "The Castle: A Genealogical Study of the Kuhl House" (1977). These sources are all available in either the Archives collections of University

and Portage County Historical Society materials or in the University Learning Resources Center.

FEATURE
LOST HOUSES OF PORTAGE COUNTY
By Wendell Nelson

The Blake-Mitchell House on Clark Street
Part II - The Blake Family

Part of the uniqueness of the grand house that sat at 711 Clark Street for so many years was the fact that it was owned by only two families--really only one family. Those families became wealthy and powerful in Portage County, as they had in the other places where they had lived before coming to Stevens Point. They added much to the growth of the young frontier town after they arrived here, and they left their mark in a number of ways.

It is difficult to write of the Blakes and the Mitchells separately, because they were related not only by marriage, but also by a close, long business association, and by the very fact that they all lived in the Clark Street house all their lives (with one exception, which we shall discuss later). But because the Blakes were the older generation, we shall consider them first.

Like a number of early settlers of Wisconsin, Nathan Blake was born in Canada. His birthplace is given in his obituaries as Stukley, "Canada East" (also known as "Lower Canada" between 1840 and 1867¹) and "Province of Quebec," which might suggest that he was of French descent. But he had an old English name, he married into a New England Yankee family, and was a member of the Presbyterian Church much of his life, so he seems to have been of old Anglo-Saxon stock.²

Blake was born on April 8, 1818, according to both obituaries, and after learning "the papermakers' /sic/ trade," he worked in several mills.³ "When 20 years old, he moved to East Charleston, Vermont, where he met Miss Julia A. Cate...to whom he was married August 16, 1843."⁴ (Her obituaries call her "Juliana.")

After their marriage, they lived in Morri-
sonville, Clinton County, New York, but
left there in 1856 to come west.⁵ They
came "by propeller" to Fond du Lac, and
from there "to Mosinee by team." While
in Mosinee, "Mr. Blake was engaged in the
mercantile business, having a large 'lum-
bermen's supply' trade. He also dealt
quite extensively in land," the Stevens
Point Journal obituary says. The Gazette
obituary adds that Blake built "the third
building erected" in Mosinee, and in the
following year "he entered into the mer-
cantile business, and also soon thereafter
became interested in a flour and feed mill."

One of Mrs. Blake's obituaries gives some
more details of her husband's beginnings
in business in Mosinee. He "was employed
at the saw mill [sic] for about two years
when he engaged in business, buying his
first stock of goods in this city [Stevens
Point] and which consisted of a sleigh
load of groceries, provisions, etc.,
costing \$50. When this was sold out he
would come here for another load, but it
was not long before his stock was bought
in larger quantities, and when he moved
to Stevens Point in 1871 Mr. Blake had a
stock valued at several thousand dollars,
besides owning several farms and other
property."⁶

The Journal notes that "it was at Mosinee
where Blake first engaged in business with
W.W. Mitchell, they owning and operating a
flouring mill together, and from that time
to the present they have been more or
less connected in all business transactions!"⁷

Exactly when Blake (and Mitchell--they
apparently left at the same time) left Mos-
inee for Stevens Point is a matter of some
disagreement in the sources. The Journal
obituary says that Blake moved here in
1871, while that in the Gazette gives the
more specific time of "the spring of 1871."
Oddly, the two papers gave exactly the
reverse information when they reported Mrs.
Blake's death in 1908. The Daily Journal
says that they moved here in "the spring
of 1871," while the Gazette gives only the
year.⁸ Both the Mitchells' obituaries
give the year as 1871.⁹

All these sources more or less agree, but

one closer to the time in question, the
History of Northern Wisconsin, says that
Mitchell moved to Stevens Point in "the
spring of 1870." Its proximity in time to
the event ought to have made it more reliable,
but such subscription histories are notor-
iously unreliable because they needed to
flatter all their subjects, and because
those gathering and assembling the data were
careless in recording them.

Fortunately, we have some other proofs of
when the two men and their families arrived
in Stevens Point, but not as many nor as
conclusive as one would like to have. One
proof is negative; the 1870 U.S. Census,
conducted by Peter Grover (of Amherst and
Amherst Junction fame?), shows no Nathan
Blake or W.W. Mitchell living (in the Second
Ward, where their house was) or working (in
the First Ward, where their stores were) in
Stevens Point as of July 26, 1870, so the
History of Northern Wisconsin is apparently
wrong, and the newspaper obituaries are appar-
ently right.

The other proofs are positive (no pun intended).
We still do not know when the two men arrived
in town, but we do know that they were here
by September 28, 1871. The Wisconsin Pinery
of that date announced that "Blake & Mitchell
have purchased the store of S.H. Karner and
are fitting [sic] the same up for business."

The location of that store--and the nature of
the goods sold in it--are given to us by
an article of a few weeks later in The Point,
which later became the Stevens Point Journal:
"BLAKE & MITCHEL [sic] have as fine an assort-
ment of Dry-goods and Groceries as may be
found in town. Call and see them at their
place of business next door north of SPRAGGON'S
on the public square."¹⁰ (Spraggon's Steam
Bakery was on the southeast corner of Main
and Second Streets, so Blake's and Mitchell's
original store must have stood in the south-
east corner of the Square itself, about where
the Little Brown Jug stands today.)

Blake's obituaries give us a few more details
about that first store. The Gazette says
that he and Mitchell opened "a general merchan-
dise store on the east side of public [sic]
square...a few months" after arriving in
town.¹¹ The Journal obituary adds that they
"did a large supply business and general

retail trade." The "supply business" probably meant that they sold food, clothing, and other goods to lumber camps.¹²

The same obituary says that Blake and Mitchell continued in partnership until 1879, when "the business was closed out."¹³ This date appears to be correct, as we shall see, but as evidence of their close connections in all affairs, the Gazette obituary says that "their business relations have never been separated and together they have since run the Mitchell mills, at the foot of Main street."¹⁴

Nevertheless, Blake apparently pulled out of the retail business. The Journal of June 28, 1879, reported the "Opening of the New Store of W.W. Mitchell & Co.": "We are gratified to be able to inform our readers that the store on the corner of Main Street and Public Square, recently vacated by I. Brill is again occupied. The new firm--W.W. Mitchell & Co.-- have been receiving their new stock, consisting of boots and shoes, drugs and medicines [sic], toilet articles, &c. this week, by the car load.... The prescription department will be under the supervision of E.J. Coyne, M.D., a graduate of Rush Medical College and a thorough pharmacist.... They also have a soda fountain, which occupies a prominent position in the front of the store, where in this sweltering weather the passer-by can refresh himself with a cooling temperance drink."

During his active business life, Nathan Blake built at least two buildings in Stevens Point besides his house. The Journal of November 7, 1874, announced that "Mr. Blake is building a ware-house at the foot of Main street, where he has a switch from the side-track. In dimensions the building will be 40 x 40 feet, one story high." Seven years later he built the second one: "The stone foundation for the new business block that N. Blake is putting up was finished last Saturday evening, and the carpenter work upon the same will be begun without delay. It will be 18 x 45, veneered with brick and contain a first-/class basement."¹⁵

The first building was probably part of what was later Mitchell's flour mill and sawmill, about where the Chamber of Commerce building is today. The second stood on the south side of Main Street, between Strong's Avenue and Third (Water) Street, about where the Tradehome Shoe store is now.¹⁶

Blake lived the rest of his life in Stevens Point, except for three years spent in California. The January 3, 1883, Gazette reported that "N. Blake and wife will accompany Wm. Walker and wife on their trip to California, starting this evening. Mr. and Mrs. B. intend to be absent about two months, during which time they expect to visit the different parts of the Golden State and enjoy its healthful climate."

This last phrase implies that Blake or his wife was in ill-health, and went to California to recover, and his Gazette obituary reinforces this implication. "January 3d, 1883, Mr. and Mrs. Blake left for San Jose, Cal., the former being in poor health at that time..."¹⁷

(The William Walker whom the Blakes travelled with, also suffered from poor health, and this trip was apparently not his first one. His entry in the Commemorative Biographical Record says that all his brothers and sisters died of consumption (tuberculosis), and that as early as 1873, "at the age of twenty years, he went with his eldest brother, James, to California, in the interest of their health. James soon afterward returned and died in Almond township."¹⁸

(William returned later, according to the Record, and tried farming in the Town of Almond, and various businesses in Stevens Point. However, the specter of consumption that had killed his family caught up with him on December 11, 1884.¹⁹

(But, of greater interest to Stevens Point readers today, he built, in 1880, the house at 1514 Strong's Avenue, which E.A. Arenberg (who married Walker's widow) remodelled, which became the Portage House, and which recently burned and was torn down.²⁰)

W.W. Mitchell and his wife travelled to California to join the Blakes in the spring of 1883, Nathan Blake's Journal obituary says.

The Mitchells "remained there until the fall of '86 when they returned to Stevens Point...."²¹ This statement appears to be incorrect; the Mitchells must have returned before that, because the July 14, 1886, Gazette announced that "W.W. Mitchell and wife left the city on Tuesday evening for San Jose, Cal. Mr. Mitchell expects to be absent only a month or two, business interests demanding his return in that time, but Mrs. Mitchell may decide to remain longer." Moreover, the September 8 Gazette says that the Blakes visited Stevens Point only once during their three-years' absence, "while Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell have spent most of the past year in this city."

During W.W. Mitchell's absence, says the Gazette of July 21, 1886, his brother, Peter J. Mitchell, "is running the Mitchell flour and feed mill in this city...." The Journal of the same week gives the same information, and adds that "Peter is an old hand in the milling business but for the past six years he has held the position of marshal of Plainfield and deputy sheriff [sic]."

As was mentioned in the preceding article in this series, while the Blakes and Mitchells were in California they rented the Clark Street house to "W.W. Haseltine and wife and F.G. Kirwan and wife...."²²

Both the Blakes and the Mitchells returned to Stevens Point in September, 1886, and lived the remainder of their lives here.²³

Nathan Blake's impressions of California show that even then it had the reputation of being an expensive state to live in: "Mr. Blake has concluded that it is Wisconsin first and California when you can't go anywhere else--especially for a man in poor or moderate circumstances. His healthy condition, financially, enabled him to remain as long as he did, and if he had been poor it is doubtful if he would have been able to return at all."²⁴

After Blake died, on October 28, 1891, he left his wife and Clara Mitchell, his only surviving child. The Blakes apparently had only two children, "one of whom died in infancy."²⁵

Mrs. Blake was born Julia (or Juliana)

Cate, and, interestingly for Portage County history, was a cousin of Judge George W. Cate and of Henry Cate, who farmed in Stockton for many years. She was of old Yankee stock from Vermont.²⁶ After she moved to Mosinee, Wisconsin, with her husband, "it was found that there were about twenty children there but no teacher and therefore Mrs. Blake taught a couple of terms, a room in their house being fitted up for that purpose."²⁷

Mrs. Blake died on January 13, 1908, leaving only her daughter and son-in-law to occupy the big house.

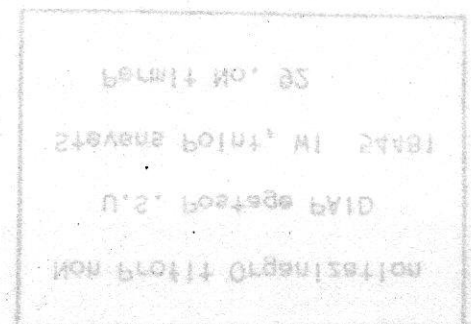
NEXT: The Mitchells.

ENDNOTES

1. P.B. Waite, "History of Canada," The World Book Encyclopedia, Volume 3, C-Ch (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1973), page 120.
2. Blake is a "variant" of "Black," and is a very common English name. C.M. Mathews, English Surnames (New York: Scribners, 1966), pages 141 and 329.
3. "Nathan Blake," Stevens Point Journal (October 31, 1891). This obituary is more detailed in some respects than that in the Portage County Gazette (October 28, 1891).
4. Journal, October 31, 1891.
5. Journal, October 31, 1891. The Gazette obituary (October 28, 1891) says "September, 1856."
6. "Mrs. Nathan Blake Dead," Portage County Gazette (January 15, 1908), page 1.
7. Journal, October 31, 1891.
8. "Death of Mrs. Nathan Blake," Stevens Point Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1. Gazette, January 15, 1908, page 1.
9. "William W. Mitchell," Stevens Point Daily Journal, (October 14, 1927), page 3. "Mrs. William W. Mitchell," Stevens Point Daily Journal, (November 20, 1933), page 3.
10. The Point (October 18, 1871).

11. Gazette (October 28, 1891).
12. Journal (October 31, 1891).
13. Journal (October 31, 1891).
14. Gazette (October 28, 1891).
15. Gazette (May 18, 1881).
16. Tap Snilloc, "Main Street When I was A Boy," Stevens Point Daily Journal (January 7, 1928), page 4.
17. Gazette (October 28, 1891).
18. Commemorative Biographical Record of the Upper Wisconsin Counties (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1895), page 556.
19. Record, page 557.
20. Many sources covering many subjects and years. Now that the Arenberg house is gone, it will be the subject of articles in this series in the future.
21. Journal (October 31, 1891).
22. Gazette (August 29, 1883).
23. Gazette (September 8 and September 15, 1886).
24. Gazette (September 15, 1886).
25. Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1.
26. Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1.
27. Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1.

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11. Gazette (October 28, 1891).
12. Journal (October 31, 1891).
13. Journal (October 31, 1891).
14. Gazette (October 28, 1891).
15. Gazette (May 18, 1891).
16. Tap Sullis, "Main Street When I was
A Boy," Stevens Point Daily Journal
(January 7, 1928), page 4.
17. Gazette (October 28, 1891).
18. Commemorative Biographical Record of
the Upper Wisconsin Counties (Chicago:
H. Sears & Co., 1892), page 256.
19. Record, page 227.
20. Many sources covering many subjects
and years. Now that the Anderson house
is gone, it will be the subject of articles
in this series in the future.
21. Journal (October 31, 1891).
22. Gazette (August 29, 1892).
23. Gazette (September 8 and September
15, 1892).
24. Gazette (September 7, 1892).
25. Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1.
26. Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1.
27. Daily Journal (January 14, 1908), page 1.