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Manitowish Waters

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The town of Manitowish Waters, the land of the Tiger Muskie is located in the northwest section of Vilas County, Wisconsin. The name is identified by it chain of fourteen lakes through which one can motor through an aera of 375 miles of shore line. It is a beautiful country, so inviting that it has lured thousands of nature loving folks from many states. It's inhabitants consist of about 300 voters besides those know as the "summer people". However, in the later years many of these pwople have prolonged their summer residency into the winter.

Seventeen years ago, the first time we visited this county, the village consisted of only a small store, La Porte's, Hansen's Hardware store, a Tavern, Resturant and the Win-Mar Resort. Today, it has grown with the influx of summer folks. A gift shop, post office, tackle shops, variety store, clothing store, new restaurant, soda fountain, barber shop and laundrymat, all doing a fine business. The older established businesses have remodeled and expanded extensively. "Take your vacation in Manitowish Waters--new ultra modern housekeeping cottages, automatic heat, showers" is a sample of advertisements, extending an invitation to city folks who like to "rough it", yet like the comforts of home. Fishing is the major interest and guides are available who do their utmost to put the fish on their clients hook. They do it too, if the fish are only a bit hungry.

So it is at the present time, a land of beauty, lakes and nature's abundance of wild life. Our family having spent seventeen summers in this country, has seen many changes. So one can realize that in ~~fifty~~ Eighty years, conditions have changed even more. During the years we have been here, we have learned to know many of the vacationers and even more so--the

natives. Among them and who have become our best friends are Tom and Mary Haskins who have lived here and have three rental cottage across the lake from us. Mary is the daughter of the late Daniel Devine, one of the first pioneers of Manitowish, and from her I learned much of the early days in the north. About the rugged, untouched land, unexplored lakes and the methods the early pioneers had to use to exist. It is to these hardy, hard working men and women we owe our debt of gratitude. They opened up a new land of natural joy for those who love nature. They made it possible by means of breaking roads through the wilderness, opening up trading centers and building shelters in which to spend the time while in quest for fish and wild life.

Daniel Devine was born in Ireland, and as a young man, migrated to this country. After having served in the Civil War, he settled in Portage, Wisconsin. Here he served as a Government surveyor, trapper and fur trader. From Portage he moved northward to the Flambeau Flowage section where he was engaged as an Indian Agent for the Reservation at Flambeau. Here he lived among the Indians, learned their mode of living, their language and also to respect and admire them. So much so that he fell in love and married an Indian girl named Kate Scott. Kate's mother was a member of the Chippewa Indian tribe. Her father, however, was of French Indian extraction and originally came from Bayfield, Wisconsin. Daniel and Kate, knowing of the many hardships ahead, were not daunted, nor were they afraid. They knew how to work, were strong and willing to meet any challenge ahead of them. They worked together clearing the land, making a home for themselves and they were happy. To this union, nine children were born, seven boys and two girls. Our Mary Haskins was one of the daughters.

The Devines lived on the Flambeau reservation for a few yaers, but mother Devine desiring a more quiet and secluded home for her children, urged her husband to give up his job and leave. Guided by his wife's council and good judgment, he moved his family to a site on what is now known as Rest Lake where the present Ilge Resort now operates. At that time it was entirely unpopulated or settled. Quietness and privacy was achieved here at the sacrifice of not having any neighbors for miles and miles. Here they carried on, the growing family assisting in their daily struggles of living. Conveniences were non-existant, engenunity was a necessity making use of every available growing plant, fruit and wild life wsa a natural duty. Hunting and fishing were not only for pleasure--it meant food on the table. Wild Rice, berries, nuts, etc. were gathered by young and old. Preservation of the fruits and game, though of primitive nature, was thorough and self-sustaining. Root cellers were a necessity in those days. They were deep pits, dug in the ground, a protection from frost and cold, in which vegetables of all kinds were stored for the winter. One of the root cellars of the Devine family still exists at the Ilge Resort--identified on the outside by "D. Devine".

Seeing an opportunity to further his ecomonic needs, Daniel opened up a trading post on the location which recently has been known as Koerner's Resort on Spider Lake. Here he traded furs with the Indians and kept a small stock of household provisions. It was the first sign of a store in the area. We can imagine the stock was saanty when one realizes how far he had to go to bring it to his post. Wausau and Fifield were the closest trading centers in which he could buy such provisions as were needed in the north woods. So, by way of water, he carried in such things as flour, salt, sugar, a few yard goods and small sundries as are needed in every

household. There were no roads, and means of transportation and communication. Mary tells about the time he filled his "dug-out" with wild cranberries to take it to Fifield. When he wsa in sight of the town, fifty miles by lake and river, the current got the best of him and the trusty craft tipped over, cranberries and all. The profits gone, no doubt he came home all but empty handed.

As I have mentioned before, Manitowish Waters consists of fourteen lakes. In the days of Devine's pioneering, these lakes were almost entirely unexplored. He learned to know them all, their characteristics and what each had to offer. So well did he know them, he had the priviledge to name most of them and are known today as--Spider, Manitowish, Island, Stone, Alder, Faun, Little Manitowish, Rest, Vance, Sturgeon, Benson, Rice, Little Star and Clear. (On Rice Creek, a flowage from Island lake, Dr. Kate Newcomb and her husband make their home. The community has been very proud of her, not only for her fame in Ralph Edward's "This is your life" program, but for her unselfish devotion to her patients). At the upper end of the chain is Clear Lake (incidentally the one of which we live). This lake had a special attraction for Devine and frontage selling for a pittance in those days, he acquired a generous portion and located there.

Here he built a log cabin--later a two story house. It must have been a real palace for that time for as Mary describes it, it had five bedrooms, large living room, huge kitchen, fire place and surrounded on two sides by a porch. Though it is still known as the Devine homestead, none of the original buildings remain. In 1926 a tornado destroyed many of the buildings which had been built on the property. Forest fires too had its share in the destruction. Mary tells how her mother would hurry the children down to the lake front when the smoke became too

thick and the fire threatening, wrap them up in blankets soaked in the lake.

As the family grew, they saw changes. More people came to the locality and with it demands for better transportation and communication. Up to that time the nearest post office was Fifield. There were no railroads, few roads by which to travel by foot or horseback. Everything was transported on water or by Indian or deer trail. The little logging that was done, meant logs had to float through the lakes and rivers to the nearest railroad or terminal point. Logs were floated down Clear Lake, Fawn, Stone and into Rest Lake, over the dam and directed by caretakers at a point what is now known as Win-Mar Resort. Though it is no longer used as a logging junction, one of the original cabins still stands as a mark of posterity. The conservation fish hatchery is located there now where one hundred fifty years ago an accumulation of logs was the center of activity. Of interest here--from the logs cut and floating on Clear Lake, ready to float down with the current, Mary and her mother scraped off the pitch. This they boiled and used for patching boats, sealing the birch bark on the canoes and birch baskets.

In the late 1800's, a new means of travel entered the picture. A railroad station was opened up at a newly established town--Manitowish. Besides the station, a post office began as did a hotel-tavern which also dealt in a bit of household needs. In order to reach the outlying districts, a stage coach began taking passengers to Flambeau, and to a point on Spider Lake called Buck's Resort, the beginning of the famous Koerner's Resort. Abe La Fave too had a small inn or resort on an island in Island Lake. It was the beginning of resorts and the influx of city people. Manitowish never grew to any great extent and during the years,

fire demolished the town three times, always to be rebuilt again. Later, many years later, Manitowish Waters, eight miles south of Manitowish, came into being, located on the shores of Rest Lake near the dam that had been used in the logging operations many years before. As far as can be ascertained Win-Mar, started by two young women, Winifred and Marie, was the first place of business. It consisted of a small restaurant, filling station, small store and a few cabins. La Porte's store was the first general store and opened up the same month as did Hansen's Hardware Store.Filling stations sprang up followed by motels, restaurants, and soda fountains. Splendid highways have been built and no longer are the people of Manitowish Waters limited to mere water transportation.

Even at the time we arrived here for the first time the roads were not what they are today. To reach our cottage three miles from the main town road, we had to pass through an almost abandoned fire-lane and from there through a very narrow path to our cottage. We bought our place without ever looking at it. That might seem lacking in commercial sense, however, when we heard the cottage was situated on 29 wooded acres of land along with a substantial frontage on the lake, it sounded good.So one can imagine how anxious we were to see what we had bought. Each mile from Milwaukee brought my husband and I, our thirteen year old daughter and our little dog, to our land of mystery. Each mile made us more and more concerned. Then following the map and directions given to us, we reached a lonely road which looked like the end of civilization. We followed it, however, wondering what we would find at the end of the path--really a cabin--was it fit to live in--did it even have a roof? The minute we caught sight of it--we loved the place. It spoke "Home". It surely wasn't a palace--it was far from being pretentious. It did have a roof--a red one brightening up the big log sidings. It also

had a huge screened porch on two sides. What was inside? We grew more and more anxious. To think we couldn't live in it mocked us. Everything was complete, in fact, too complete because every corner was filled with a variety of furniture, knick-knacks and "what have you", most of which we disposed of. We hurriedly cleaned and scrubbed, my husband and daughter scrubbing the two bedrooms and living room floors while I found myself a place discarded items. When they reached the kitchen after pushing everything in that direction in order to make room for their operations, they promptly went on a strike and said: "now mama, you take care of the kitchen". What a kitchen? Three stoves--a large wood range resting on short cedar logs and two oil stoves both almost beyond repair. A sink was in the corner, water pail on one side and over it a kerosene lamp in a bracket. Three tables took more room, and the kitchen was small.

That summer, a friend of ours accepted our invitattion to spend several weeks with my daughter and I in "the wilderness", when my husband drove away, leaving us to fend for ourselves, we were not prepared for the many surprises in store for us. We had no car, no motor on our boat and even more serious, we knew no one in this strange country. However, we did not realize the significance of all this because we loved the place and all it had to offer. The days passed all too quickly as we scrubbed, painted, cleared out brush and in many ways made our surroundings more comfortable and attractive. Every day we fished--day time for pan fish and evenings for walleyes and crappies. After the sun went down, we three would saly forth, sometimes bringing in as many as a dozen pike in a few hours. Sometimes we were started, and I'll admit a bit scared when we heard the coyote near by. With only an oil lantern as a protection against the darkness, needless to say we made a grand rush up the

hill and into our cottage. We went again and again and nothing ever happened to us.

That summer was extremely hot, and in this country, hot weather usually means a severe electric storms. It started to rumble early one evening, and rumbling became deeper grumbling accompanied by flashes of lightening we had never experienced before. The three of us tried to act nonchalant, played cards and told each other we were not afraid. It wasn't long before the wind came accompanied by a down pour. Still it thundered and lightened--and rained. We heard a drip--drip somewhere in the house. Upon investigation we discovered the roof must be leaking. Then another "drip-drip" in a different corner. These drips multiplied until we had thirteen water falls under which we placed a variety of pots and kettles. If we wern't alarmed, it might have been funny. Each pan had a different tone as the water hit. Even our clock on the wall was suffering. Tears fell down its face as a result of a leak directly over it. The storm left and returned several times during the night, lasting until eleven o'clock the following morning. The water in the lakes rose eight inches.

Another storm brought us a new experience, that of unexpected guests. It had begun to rain and storm in its usual manner and having taken shelter inside the cottage we were not immediately aware of the knocking at our front door. For an instant I was alarmed for outside the door stood a burly Indian. (I was always told we never need be afraid of the four legged animals--just the two legged ones). When he asked if we would provide shelter for a family he was guiding, our attitudes changed and we gladly welcomed them in. It was shelter for them, but for us, that hour brought us a world of information and interesting facts about the country up here. "Dakota" as the guide was called ahd gone to College

with folks we knew and had a real gift in telling us how to fish, who the neighbors were and about the life and habits of the wild animals living among us. He especially dwelt on the black bear.

Bear to us were something we had only read about and were surprised to hear that we shared the woods with them. So, it wasn't too surprising that we had the scare of our lives the very next day. As we were returning on foot from the "little store", three miles from our place laden down with many bags of groceries, we heard a "thump, thump" of footsteps apparently following us. A Bear! And running after us! We ran as fast as we were able looking for some means of escape. Over the hill we panted and puffed, no one looking back to see if he was gaining on us, finally taking a bit of courage, I took time off to glance backward. To my surprise, not to say the greatest relief, I saw a yearling deer runing up to us. He nuzzled us, trying to tell us he was our friend, and too, he would like a taste of some of those "goodies" we were carrying. Gladly we shared most of the candy bars we had expected to hoard until our next trip. He like us and he liked the candy, so much so in fact he walked all the wayyhome with us, walking by our side, always welcoming a friendly pat. We heard later that he had been tamed and had no fear of man.

Two summers later, my daughter and I stayed here alone and carried on our same mode of living. Without any warning, one morning I suffered a heart attack. Being the first experience and knowing no method of relief, we both were more than alarmed. No motor on the boat and even though we had a car, my fifteen year old daughter was unable to drive. She propped me up with pillows, instructed me to lie perfectly quiet while she went for help. I never realized the courage it took for her to row across the lake to find a telephone and any assistance she could find. It

wasn't long before the neighbors from around the lake arrived offering their help, convincing us that the good old fashioned neighborly kindness has not been forgotten. This same neighborliness is evidenced today by Tom and Mary watching for our light from across the lake. If they sense anything amiss, they come to investigate. We do likewise.

The woods has its handicaps as well as its beauty we found out on one of our trips up here in late October. We usually traveled by day light, but having had to call for our daughter after school hours, we failed to reach our destination until late in the evening. All went well until we entered our last treck into the cottage. Here we encountered a hazard--a tree had fallen across the road. It wasn't a large one and we soon had it removed. We countinued a few feet farther only to find another. A reputition of this went on for a few more trees and we breathed a sigh of relief. That was it. We were mistaken, however, because before we had gone only a few yards more a mighty pine lay in our way of progress, a barrier we could not surmount. It had begun to rain and the night was dark and unfriendly. What to do! We had no flashlight--not even a match to light our way. To walk to our cottage was the only solution. So, gathering only our necessities from the car, we began our walk in the black night. First in line was my husband carrying a box of groceries on his shoulders, then our daughter loaded down with two suit cases, last but not least in the procession, I carried the dog. All went well for a few yards, only to be brushed in the face with branches--another tree in the path. The only chance we had to stay in the path was to keep exactly in the wheel tracks. So we dare not deviate. Over the trees we climbed. My husband and daughter both being tall met with less opposition, but I am short and hung in the branches almost unable to loosen their grip. To say it was dark would be stating it mildly. Even as we

walked directly after each other, we could not detect if one stopped and many times we bumped into each other almost upsetting groceries, bags and all. Leaves in the wheel tracks confused us and we wern't sure we were on the path. Never was a mile so long. It is now beginning to snow and we were feeling the cold penetrating our bodies. Imagine our relief when we saw a light--it was from across the lake. Then we knew we were near home. Only a few hundred feet and we entered our domain. It was the first and I hope the last walk in a dark cold night.

Getting back to pioneer days, it was interesting to me to learn of the early settlers means of livelihood in northern Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing and trapping brought food on the table as well as fur pelts to sell. The means of attaining these wild commodities were varied. Bears were numerous, to snare one, one had to have a very strong trap. Mary tells of an incident when her father had baited a trap with maple sugar. In the morning on his visit to the several traps, he heard a horrible roar. Here was a baer on his back legs cursing and raving, vending all his fury on the trap in which he was caught. He was shot immediately and his skin was used as a fur robe. They still have the fur robe in their home.

Another incident worth relating was the story of a neighbor coming breathless in the early morning to the Devine home. He had run all the way from his home to tell them he was afraid he had shot a man the night before and--"what should he do?" According to the tale, someone had stolen the mother pig, leaving a litter of 12 young ones. He had heard the noise in the night--ran out and just glimpsed a man carrying the pig, running over the hill as fast as he could. Losing no time in thought, he shot once, twice and three times and then saw no more. By that time, he began to realize what he had done and went to find the man. Maybe he hadn't killed him, hoping and praying he hadn't. After a long search

he found no man--only the dead pig. Here was the problem. Where did he go? Mr. Devine and his wife, Mary and her brother tagging along joined the poor wood-be murderer in the search. When they found the foot prints, they were convinced it had been a bear--not a man at all. Mary tells how she and her brother were presented with two of the motherless pigs to raise. They not only raised them to be fine pigs but spoiled and loved them so much, their father never could use them for what pigs usually become--pork.

Deer in those days were numerous and venison was a standard meat supply. They shot what they needed, careful to save the doe and never resorted to killing the young faun. Fishing must have been a fishermans paradise those years. If one was so inclined he had only to go to the edge of the lake with simple homemade fishing tackle and in an hours time have plenty of "big ones" for dinner. Muskies bit more readily as did the pike. We think they have become educated in the years and have learned to distinguish between sportsmen, who want to fish for the sport of it and those who fished for food on the table when it was a necessity.

Wild Rice is a delicacy today, and well it might be when one begins to realize what tasks are involved in gathering and curing it. Wild rice has been know to be the Indians friend, and ## we as adolpted Americans have learned a great deal about food from the real natives--the Indians. For many years, the Indians have labored gathering rice, selling some and retaining some for their own use. Mary and Tommie (as his friends call him) have learned enough from their parents to follow the old methods of gathering and curing. In the late summer, they tie bunches together with a rope made from dried and cured bass wood strips. In tying it, they float their canoe close to the beds in the lake, separating it here and there into bunches so the rice can ripen and dry. In a week's

time, dependant on the weather, they again go into the beds with their canoe--bend the stalks over the canoe and shake the kernels loose. It takes many hours and many days to gather a hundred pounds of rice. The rice then has to be shucked, this is done by shaking a small amount in a flat birch basket, loosening the shucks which fly away from the kernel. After this process is completed, it is left to dry and then comes the roasting process. We have watched them and fully appreciate why the price of wild rice should be what it is today. It really takes patience. First a fire is built out in the open and when it comes to the charcoal stage a small quantity of rice is poured in a tub, placed over the fire and roasted. By maens of a paddle, the rice is kept stirred while it roasts to a light brown color. Then it is wild rice as we buy it in the store. How easy to cook it--what a tedious job to get it that far! It might be interesting to note that scouters from a Hollywood Studio appreciated rice gathering and curing so much that a few yaers ago they shot films of Mary and Tom while in the process of gathering it in Big Lake.

Store bought canned goods and fruit were non-existant in the early days. If one wanted fruit, one had to gather it. It was here for the taking. There are black and blue berries today, but the supply is limited. When civilization and people move in, it seems nature hides its better self and fails to flourish abundantly. Cranberries grew wild and were gathered by the bushel. So were blue berries, thorn apples, raspberries and black berries. Preserving followed a different pattern from what it does today. Mary tells how her mother worked from dawn to dusk drying and preserving for her hearty eating family. Blue berries were gathered and placed on a birch bark covered table outside in the bright sun light. Here they dried for days, attaining the appearance of our dried currents of today. These were used all winter to make Tasty dishes and baked

goods. Thorn apples were crushed together with cranberries to make a jelly we today could not buy for a million. Fish were smoked, pork was cured and preserved, hams were smoked and vegetables they grew were carefully stacked away in the root cellar.

Baskets which were made from birch bark were substitute for the over evidenced pails of today. Boats, were made by the Hollowing trees and were called "dug outs". We can hardly feature anyone today going through the process of creating such a craft. First, a large tree had to be felled and cut to a length desirable for the boat. Then the bark had to be whittled off and pared down to be a boat shape. More chiseling, paring and hollowing out thin enough to be sea worthy. Many shapes and sizes of broad axes, chisels and knives were employed until the dug out was completed. They were known to be sturday and practical for the hard wear they had to withstand. The making of the birch bark canoe was another masterpiece and a product of artistry and patience. Birch bark was removed from the trees, the heaviest bark possible. This was then sewed together and sealed. The roots of the scrub oak were ripped apart and prepared in such a way as to make cord for sewing. Pitch scraped off logs was boiled and used for sealing the sewings. To shape the canoe itself, a "mold" was formed out of stone. Thus the birch bark was streched over the mold and held in place by strips of cedar. Mary tells how she watched her mother as well as her father construct a canoe.

Maple sugar was a source of sweets for the pioneer families. Early in March even as the snow lay four feet deep the family would treck through the woods on snow shoes to "tap" the maple trees. Birch baskets were hung under the spouts and the sap would drip for days. Huge kettles were hung from home made shafts arranged over an open fire. Thus the maple sap became a boiling mass and finally reached the syrup stage and

after much more stirring and processing--maple sugar.

Nor was it all work and no play for the Devine family as well as the other families of that generation. There were no planned recreation programs for the children. They planned and made their own. They made their own toys and made the rules for their own games. They had a clean, cool lake to swim and fish in --green grass to romp in and tall friendly trees to remind them that nature is child's best friend.

Today, this country is still lovely. The trees are here as are the lakes, the wild flowers and many manifestations of nature's glory. To watch the barren branches thicken in the spring time, a promise of young green leaves soon to appear. To listen each morning for the return of the birds from the southland. To watch where they build their nests and hope they is not ~~neglected~~- molested by the saucy chipmunks or squirrel. Then in the early evening hours the serenity is broken by the song of the red wing blackbirds, followed by the whip-poor-will's long tirade. To be out on the water to see the sunset, the sun in all its glory slowly descending lower and lower into the green horizon. Then, as it darkens, and if one is just that fortunate, there is the profound sight of the northern lights. With no obstruction out on the lake one can see the whole panarama of lights. If the "lights" arn't on, there are the stars. As we fished, we would watch for the appearance of Venus, North star, Big dipper and Little dipper until the whole sky was filled with dots of brilliant settings.

Then our city friends say: "don't you get lonesome away off in the woods?" Nature doesn't let us down. There are the animals during the day and the night. It takes one a yaar or two to recognize their sounds and their habits. The chipmunk and squirrels are busy all day gathering food, chipping and knocking. Even the bear are out during the day. We see

him occasionally around our cottage, but he loses interest when he fails to get a food scent. We are careful not to leave any food or garbage within "smelling" distance--and food is all he is after.

During the nights, as we sleep on the porch, we have become accustomed to the different foot steps. The heavy ones and which make a heavy rustle in the thicket is either a deer, a coyote, racoon, porkupine or a skunk. The smaller noises in the leaves and grass are bound to be chipmunks, squirrels, mink or even a sly fox. Occasionally and fortunately only occasionally we hear the eerie sound of the bob-cat. We've seen him a few times, and the farther away he stays in the woods, the better we like it. From the distance we haer the wail of a coyote and as he comes nearer, the sound becomes a bark. He, too, I can do without. The fox at a distance sounds like our little fox terrier, Tuppie. However, we know it is not a dog because our closest neighbor is three miles away. The first time we heard a deer speak his piece we were disapointed. Its an unmusical sound--a snort and very dissolusioning, considering what a beautiful animal he is. We mustn't forget the loon--the "crazy" loon as he is often called. The first time we heard him on the lake we wondered who was beating the baby. Such a cry heard echoing through all the lakes, a far mournful cry. Yet, I guess they are happy for they spend hours playing over and under the water, diving under for minutes at a time coming up for air away across the lake. What a comical fellow is the racoon! Twice, he visited us as far as the front porch. Here he stood waiting to be invited in. He studied us intently and we did likewise. He soon became bored with human faces and walked slowly away to his own domain.

Manitowish Waters has all this and more, So have other sections of Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. I just happen to know this land and

love it for what it has given me. Thuggh it is becoming more and more populated, it is still unspoiled. Especially so if one is at all isolated from the traffic on the highways and speed boats on the Lake. One can have neighbors close by if one wishes, and socialability is prevalent in this country. On the other hand, if one loves nature undisturbed, a few acres on a lake answers the desire. Though we keep in contact with our neighbors, exchange calls and social contacts, we still like our isolated little log cabin on Clear Lake in the land of Manitowish Waters.