

Forest fire burned the life out of Buswell

By Jean Rein

Special to The Lakeland Times

The recent Lakeland Times millennium special edition celebrated many area communities which have existed through good times and bad for the past century.

In addition to these Northwoods communities which began as logging centers and went on to become meccas for sportsmen and vacationers, a few villages were established, flourished and then disappeared from sight, remembered only by a few pioneers.

As the numbers of these old-timers diminish, they believe it is important that this history be known to the many newcomers who love the peace and beauty of the area, and have little knowledge of those who labored here in the past, blazing trails which led to paved roads and discovering fabulous fishing lakes now enjoyed by many.

The community of Buswell

One of the communities which has left few traces for the 21st century is Buswell, once home to more than 200 people, along the shore of Papoose Lake in Winchester township, Vilas County.

Although James K. (Ken) Duncan is not one of the pioneers of Buswell, he has long been fascinated by this former town's brief history. He has collected much information and many pictures describing the former community. He started coming to the area

in 1946, to the resort of another survivor of the boom days in Buswell, Tony Marciniak. His stories led to Duncan's compilation of the village history.

Tony and Rose Marciniak ran the mess hall in Buswell for the crews of loggers and mill employees. Logging and the sawmill and planing mill were the sole reasons the village was created.

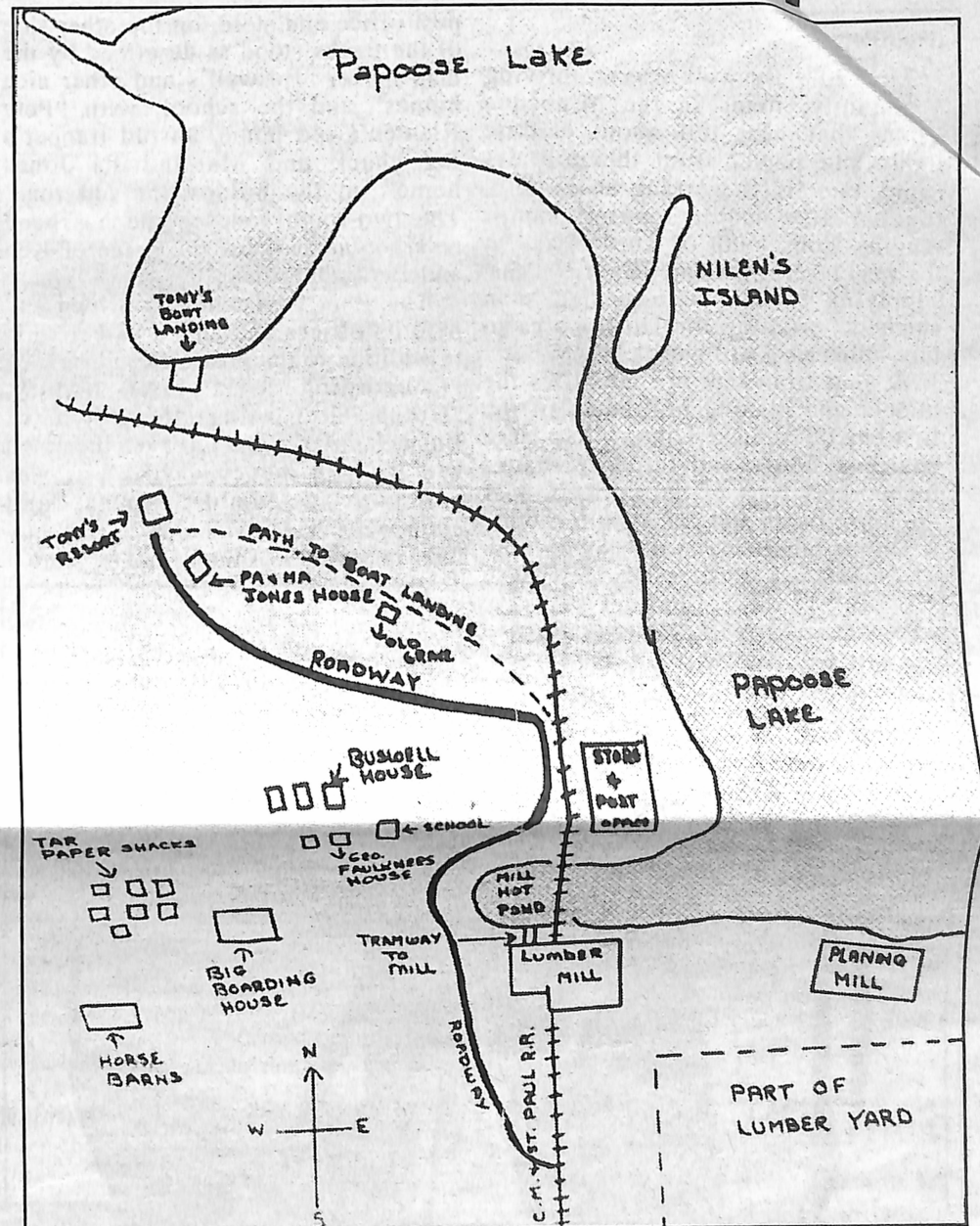
The village developer was F. W. Buswell, a lumber man from Minneapolis who acquired large tracts of land valued for its timber in an area midway between the present communities of Presque Isle, Boulder Junction and Manitowish Waters at the turn of the last century.

In the fall of 1905, the Buswell Company began hauling by horse drawn teams equipment and supplies delivered to the railroad station in Manitowish to the future village. The first project was to erect a small sawmill. This little mill cut the wood to build a larger structure, which would be equipped with machinery delivered by a new railroad line to Buswell scheduled to be finished the next spring.

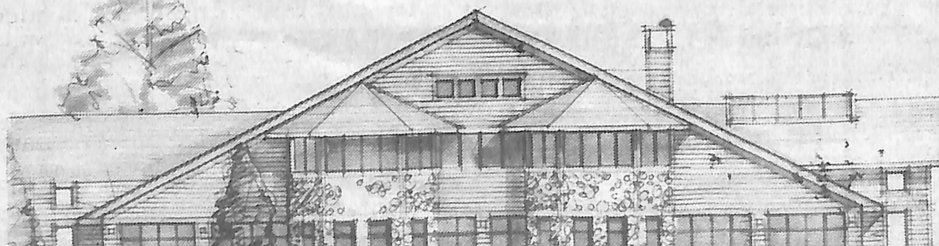
At the same time a post office was established, and other construction began in the village to house the work force.

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AAL makes Fortune 500 list for sixth consecutive year

APPLETON, Wis. (April 2000) – Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) is listed on the 1999 Fortune 500 list of the nation's largest companies for the sixth consecutive year.

The Fortune magazine annual ranking was released April 3.



BUSWELL: Town issued its own 'chits'

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By 1907, Buswell was a thriving community; items in the Minocqua Times that year tell about electric lights and power from the mill dynamo, two shifts working at the mill, four or five major logging camps ranging from south of Turtle Lake to the west to near Presque Isle to the east supplying lumber, and special "man catchers" working the Hurley area to lure lumberjacks to work.

A map from that era identifies the lumber and planing mill south of the first bay of Papoose Lake, with a large boarding house and tarpaper shacks for workers west of the railroad, near the horse barns and blacksmith shop.

On the other side of the bay was the

post office and store; on the other side of the tracks stood as described by the map maker "Buswell's and other nice homes" and the school, with "Pete Klassen's old home, an old trapper's log shack and Ma and Pa Jones home" up the hill on the old road. The two-room Jones home has been enlarged and is now the home of Ken and Betty Duncan.

The store was company-owned and held its offices and also a barber shop in addition to the post office.

According to a brief history, "Notes (Regarding the town of Buswell)" by John LaFave, the town had its own money, "chits," as was common in lumber towns, and employees had no choice but to buy their necessities at the company store.

LaFave, himself a pioneer of the family which established the first resort in the area on Island Lake, was very fascinated with the village and its short history.

There were two company doctors, Frankel and Hamilton, who served the community according to preserved documents.

Recreational activities during the town's short life were remembered by its former residents: a band, a baseball team, fishing and hunting, kids receiving treats of cookies and doughnuts from the cooks at the company mess hall.

Two teachers are remembered from the local school; the first was Gertrude Falconer who started when the school was established in 1906, the other was Daisy Martin, who came in 1909 and stayed until the town vanished.

Why it vanished

And the reason the town virtually vanished only five years after it was established? According to the "American Lumberman" newspaper of July 23, 1910:

"Buswell, a small sawmill town in Vilas County, practically was wiped off the map last week by forest fires. The sawmill, planing mill, boarding house, store, blacksmith shop, barn, icehouse, boathouses and 11,000,000 feet of hardwood, pine and hemlock lumber piles in the yards were totally destroyed.

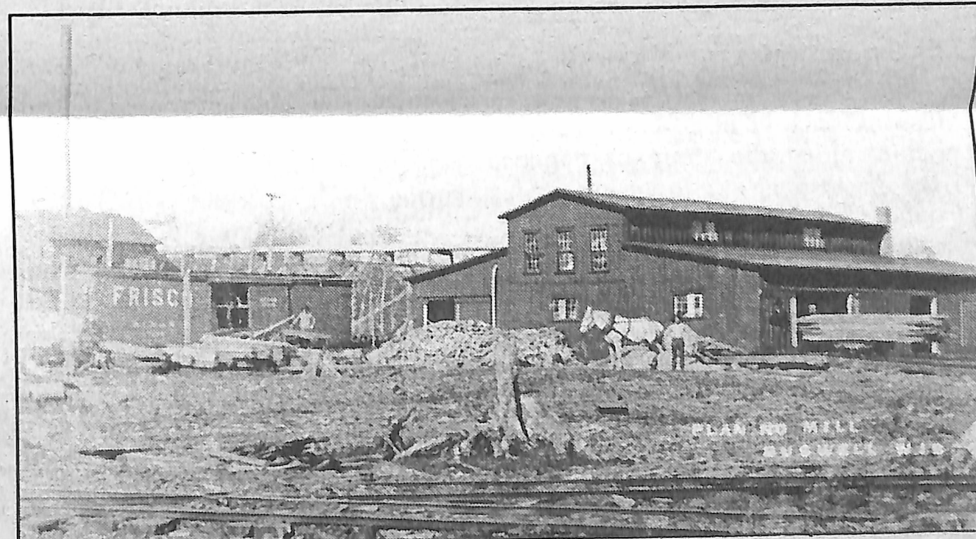
"The loss to the Buswell Lumber & Manufacturing Company, which owned the village, will be between \$200,000 and \$300,000. It is not likely

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"Union Depot" at Buswell. Pictured is Joanne Ohlson.



Planing mill at Buswell.

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MANITOWISH WATERS
MAIN OFFICE

VANISHED:

(From Page 20)

that the plant will be rebuilt, as the company has remaining a cut of only two or three years."

The article continues by saying all the residents of the village, between 200 and 300, escaped unharmed. "Women and children were sent to safety to an island on Papoose Lake. There they spent the night in fear of death by suffocation. The men remained behind to fight the fire and look after what remained."

Although one short newspaper account dated July 5 stated the mill would be rebuilt, another from Wausau dated Aug. 23 reports that Buswell "has removed to this city where he has secured a home and has opened an office. He hopes to have the company's logs manufactured into lumber and shingles at one of the mills in this city."

Those who heard the story of the fire were told that most of the mill workers did drift off to other towns very soon after the fire, since they had no jobs in Buswell. The little train continued to come several times a week with supplies for the few who stayed, which included loggers cutting in the unburned woods near Presque Isle Lake. The train took these logs to Wausau for sawing on its return trips.

John LaFave's notes state he remembered some junk dealer from Wausau or Merrill filled several train cars with metal salvaged after the fire.

Early in 1914, the trains discontinued regular service, the post office closed, and the company sold its



Papoose Junction - where a line went north to Buswell, another west to Rest Lake from the main line which came from Minocqua to Boulder Jct. to the junction. This 1912 picture shows Tom Devine, Jr. and Jack Luck, relatives of Ken Perkins, whose widow Ellen spends her summers on Clear Lake.

land. The new owners first raised sheep and later pigs on the former town site, as the physical remains and memories of Buswell quickly faded from most people's minds.

Resort grew from ashes

But a few who loved the area managed to stay, or return in later years, such as the Marciniaks. They opened a resort where Duncan vacationed yearly for many years starting in 1946, paying \$28 a week for a cabin, meals and a boat. In 1966 the Duncans, who farmed in Indiana, bought their present property, where they retired in 1980.

Over the years, Duncan began compiling information about the former Buswell, locating the former town well, finding "artifacts" from the past (mostly discarded liquor bottles in the ravines along the path from the village center).

He also learned many had tried scuba diving in the bay near the former mill to find articles from the town's boom days, only to be stymied by the muck which has buried whatever might have been there.

He said the present Papoose Road from Hwy. K was established directly over the former railroad line. One old

building from the Buswell era can be seen along the west side of the road, and a few other old cabins are all that remain of the former town.

A concise summary of postal service to Buswell sums up its brief history: Established Oct. 27, 1905, John C. Bull, postmaster; followed by Nathan Henderson in 1907, John Lockhart in 1909, M. Jones in 1911, Peter Klassen in 1912, discontinued March 31, 1914

In eight and one half years the village was established, prospered, burned and ceased to exist.