

Some nearly forgotten Manitowish Waters names and businesses:

West from the present heart of town, along Highway 51:

At Manitowish proper, there were two places of refreshment in the 1930s and 1940s which still survive in one form or another:

One is Chuck's bar, which at that time--the Forties, say--had a little grocery store at the ^{bar}end of the building from the barroom.

The other was the Corner Inn, now the Ding-A-Ling (spelling?). It was first built as a little place with its longer side, a wall of windows, facing the road, and I believe Laffins established it before building Circle Lily. It was a popular place at train time, for a drink or a meal before or after the train, or waiting for the train which was so often late. The couple who owned it at the transition to the modern stuccoed building were Carol and Roy Bornofska; he also did plumbing. They were very proud of the new building, and especially of the stucco and of the little steep roofed entry way. They served very fine meals, but I think the dining room was smaller in the original Bornofska era. Later, whether immediately after them, came Monroe Lamberty, and eventually the present owners.

The post office was located in a house that is now derelict down beyond Chuck's, near the gas plant. (There was also, in the 1940s, a small sawmill between the post office and the present gas plant, operated by a man named Kountney or Karshney; the other was a mechanic in Mercer.) He did custom sawing, including some popple lumber for us. A rural route ran out of the Manitowish post office for many years, and on Sundays the post office was open for a few hours in the morning and since there was no delivery on that day, we could drive down and pick up our mail after church. The office was a tiny one, with a few lock boxes, and was open full time on weekdays, of course. The fizz went out of it after the Manitowish Waters post office was established right after World War II. The postmasterhip was held perhaps all through its history by the Ramsey Andrews family, notably by Mrs. Emma Andrews and in succession her daughters Geraldine and Phyllis. Mrs. Andrews died at the age of 100, Gerry next, and Phyllis only in the decade of the Nineties, I would guess.

The railroad station at Manitowish dated from the construction of the railroad, maybe in the 1880s. It was a small board-and-batten building with a bay window on the track side, and a long platform edged by railroad ties and perhaps paved with macadam, or just fine gravel. A screen separated the waiting room, with its long benches along two or three walls, from the agent's office, and a big pot belly stove was an interruption in that screen, wire above, wooden 2x2's at 45 degree angles to the room and about 30 inches high, with the screen above; as one stood at the ticket window, nearest to the track side of the room, the ticket case was on the left. There was always the sound of the telegraph that the dispatchers used and Western Union used, but the agent also had a local phone and, later, a company phone line. A large door on the track side opened to the baggage room, for baggage and express which was transferred from the train to the room by the agent, using the familiar wagon with the red metal wheels, kept from rolling by a chain hanging from the body which the agent would hook around a rim of a wheel.

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West from the present heart of town--2

The station, continued. When the baggage room proved to be too small, after World War II, the railroad sawed the building in half and pulled the halves apart, poured a cement slab to the level of the floor of the two halves, and then framed in and roofed the gap. I think the slab is still there. It was not removed at the time the station was removed, at any rate. Around the Fifties the railroad--the Chicago & North Western Railway--it is important to note that North Western was two words--began consolidating stations and the Manitowish agent was eliminated, though the agent simply continued on as the agent in the much larger Mercer station building; for decades Harry Thieme was the agent. Just north of the Manitowish station was a short side track for loading or unloading freight cars, with such items as pulpwood.

Hiding in the trees now is a building that was the Manitowish school, one of three in the Manitowish Waters area. Another, also converted into a house, was at Powell, and the first Manitowish Waters school was on the Deer Park grounds on Manitowish Lake.

Between the station hamlet and the Iron-Vilas County line were two landmarks into the 1930s. On the old 51 stretch now a town road and bypassed by a relocation of 51 in the 1950s was the Plunkett farm, a working farm till perhaps the Depression, with two elderly brothers its last occupants. Mrs. Plunkett was a widow who took in boarders as part of her livelihood since she was a widow from fairly early in her married lifetime; the family that owned what later became Koerner's resort, for instance, sent their elderly parents to Mrs. Plunkett's during the summers. The senior Plunkett had been a timber cruiser or other type of forest worker. The only Plunkett daughter I know of was Mrs. Rosella Wysocki. Rosella and her husband Emil had the farm on Highway W north of the Oasis whose barn still stands. They survived into the 1980s or 1990s, Emil till age 100.

Where the present wayside and canoe landing along Hwy. 51 is located now, there used to be a steel bridge across the river, a drive-through girder type that was dismantled for scrap during World War II, if not earlier. The road that crossed it ran to Sandy Beach Lake and Powell; part of it is still in use as access to the campground. I believe the road was a county trunk, but when present Highway 47 was pushed through from the Highway 182 junction to Manitowish, the need for that road ended.

On the drive from the station, the first landmark near town was the Circle Lily resort complex, established by the Laffins and active by the 1930s and 1940s. The buildings were of vertical log construction and were painted their distinctive green and orange. The main building was the tavern with dining room and family quarters, located on the inland side of (old, now) 51, and there were rental cottages on both the river and land sides of the road, as I recall. The property went through several changes of owner and the franchise eventually went to a supper club built anew nearer to the present highway. Its final reincarnation after fires and such is the present canoe-related shop built on the footprint of the old (last) supper club.

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West from the present heart of town, along Highway 51:--3

Along the older version of 51 between Circle Lily, in order going east, were a chicken farm and at least one small resort. The chicken establishment was on the inland side, and a small housekeeping resort, Tichy's Knotty Pine Cottages, was on the river side. If I recall aright, the Tichys may have had a little place with a few tables for eating--sandwiches and the like--in the main building for the cottages.

There were two resorts reached from 51 east of there. On little Dog Lake was a housekeeping resort, DeWoodys' Waukegan Lodge, and on the river or Benson Lake on the opposite road in from 51 was Jones' Lakewood Lodge, another housekeeping resort.

The highway then curved to where Trail's End is now located, and for many years in a smaller building more at right angles to the highway, a man named Neil LaPorte ran a tavern known as the Veteran's Inn.

The next business or even dwelling on 51 was the present Fireplace Inn, built as the Tower Tea Room, so named because there was originally a state fire tower on the little knob above it (and at one time a ranger's house where the overflow parking is today). In the time that is most familiar to me, it was a bar with food, still called the Tower, and operated by Bill and Martha Garber. The building of upright logs adjacent to it was for a limited time a post office, with a man named Frank Laundrie or Laundry as postmaster (also sheriff; his farm on the back road between Winchester and Mercer became the Ghiloni horse place in modern times. I cannot give a date for that.)

Right at the west end of the dam was Northern Lights Resort, which I think went through a succession of four owners. The resort operated the bar across the highway which is now the Pine Baron's, though it first was built as a real estate office in the era of great dreams--the Twenties or Thirties. The Otto Oestreichs first developed the resort, which was an American plan resort of hotel with outlying cottages. The main building was substantial, built of masonry and stucco finished as I recall: I think maybe Mr. Oestreich was a mason specialist. There were rooms upstairs on both side of a central hallway, with running water but not bathrooms in the rooms, and a dining room below. A feature of the outside was the Dutch colonial type roof; in the inside, in the dining room I think all the chairs and tables were painted light green. Couples named Kuhnert and Zigrays ran it in succession after Oestreich, the Kuhnerts in the forties. Then two young couples followed them and it probably closed under their ownership.

Across the dam on the park side ^{stood} another forgotten business, the Win-Mar. It was effectively put out of business by a fire perhaps in the Forties but had been an attractive low building with a bar and dining area and a grocery store; Emil Wysocki was the contractor who built. The name came from the first syllables of the two female co-owners, Winnie and Marie (young and Zimmerman; I don't remember which was which; the father of one was a caretaker of the dam.)

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West of the core of the village, and at the core--4

The Win-Mar, continued: the Win-Mar also had a few housekeeping cottages on the other side of the highway, on the lower level in from the water's edge where the fish hatchery was, and facing the lake. After the fire the owners moved one of the buildings up to the edge of the road from down below and continued the tavern and cottage business, but not with the flair that the burned-out place had had. Their tavern eventually became the present Pea Patch.

The other business in the central business area can provide their own historical details. One obscure detail, though, is that the building where the Bavarian is located now was originally built as a bakery, and later, or instead, was operated after the end of Prohibition by a couple named Schroeder as a tavern and eating place, with a few rooms upstairs, the jerkin-head gable betrays its construction during the 1920s or early 1930s.

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West of the central business area on old Highway 51--5

Completely forgotten in most minds, or totally unknown are two other institutions of the 1930s of which no traces can be found without stretching the imagination,

Between old Highway 51 and a bend in the Manitowish River just into Iron County, and now on the forlorn stub of old 51 leading from the west to Circle Lily Creek, the Roosevelt Administration's Civilian Conservation Corps had Camp Mercer, a complex of barracks and service buildings of a military style, sheathed in roll material like tarpaper with white vertical boards at intervals a few feet apart. The 1941 war ended the need for the Depression-era job-creating corps and after the war the buildings were dismantled and the land went to the state.

The land also went to the state and the buildings were demolished also on the point jutting out into Vance or Dam lake from the north just below the dam. There a lady named Ethel Powell ran a little American plan resort, a very humble one, and after her death an auction marked the end of her little business. Afterwards the state turned part of the property into camping sites. The period when the old woman had the resort would have come to its end in the late Thirties or early Forties, and apparently the closing came suddenly when she took ill or died. Her resort was named Fern Lodge.

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Manufacturing:

A man named Ratliff (O.S. Ratliff, perhaps?) manufactured TV antenna towers for home installation, not the sort that broadcasting stations use; his shop was on what is now Eight O'Clock Boulevard

In another small local business, John Hanson's father in law (Ralph?) Hill produced Hills Hornets, archery points, on the side of Alder Lake nearer to Hy. 51.

Long ago, Robert Loveless had a sawmill on Alder Lake; his involvement with Manitowish Waters would go way back to the early 1900s; I believe he was a caretaker or some employee of the wealthy Chicagoan who had the retreat on Little Trout Lake. Loveless also had the tavern on Highway 51 opposite Michael's and presently closed and for sale, Marty Cain's for a time after Loveless, later still Schauer's. He had, beside the tavern a cage, roofed over, in which he kept a bear and sold bottled soft drinks for visitors to feed the bear, who had learned to drink from bottles. Ever the entrepreneur, he also had rental cottages, I believe, and had Virgin Forest Park, the amusement pavilion right on the shore of the lake (Alder), for dances and parties, perhaps even with music or entertainment; it was a big building with screens rather than windows, and shutters in case of bad weather. He phased it out around the time of World War II; we bought some of his rude tables and benches for our outdoor grilling area. I believe Bev Trapp was a granddaughter of his. In the property was also located one of the first alternative grocery stores at that end of town, Van Deldens'. It was in business on a few years in the latter 1940s, overshadowed by the much nicer Ehlert's Market, later a liquor store and laundry. Harry's Super Market followed after Ehlert's. In the beginning days of the cranberry marshes no telephone lines reached the marsh area and Ehlerts were very good about taking their messages.

Longwood Lodge --
Longwood Inn
Knapp's - Spruce
Holiday Lodge - Dog Lake
Haskins' - (Alder Lake) Hwy 10
Dunn's (Hwy 10) - (Alder Lake)
(1st main street)

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Michael's - (Dog Lake)
Stone Lake Cottage -
Longwood
Spider Lake - Koe's
(both sides of bridge)
Silverdale - (Alder Lake)
Ladys - (Alder Lake)
Coke - Alder

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