I SAW CONSERVATION GROW

By Harry Kozel

Since the days of the white-pine log drives down the Manitowish River, through the cut-out and get out era, and that period during the early twenties when thousands of acres of Iron Co. burned over, conservation as we know it today has come a long way. Let's quote some of the "Oldtimers".

Matt Plunkett, Manitowish

Matt has been in and around Iron County since 1891. His first job was with the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company on a steamboat that plied the Manitowish Chain of Lakes, towing the white-pine logs to the dam for their ride down the river. Matt says, "There is just one thing wrong with conservation, it should have been started 100 years ago. More timber burned than was ever cut." He recalls one fire in the vicinity of their old farm that was fought for three weeks to save the buildings. The Powell Marsh burned often and on occasion the peat burned through the winter. The deer, Matt reports, "were very scarce in the nineties for there wasn't much for them to eat in the big timber." Second only to fire control, Matt believes is the tree planting program and is sorry the CCC and WPA did not devote more time toward that end.

M. E. Brandt, Mercer

Mr. Brandt was here when Mercer's first election was held in 1909 - "Things were rugged in those days; 204 votes were cast in the election, almost twice as many as the number of residents." He says the first conservation efforts were to improve fishing. In about 1910, Mr. Sherlock, a summer resident on Long Lake, applied for federal fish for planting. When these fish were received, Fred Vaughn planted them in Long Lake, but it turned out they were Northern pike instead of walleyed pike, as supposed, for in a few years they were being caught and slowly spread throughout the entire Turtle Chain of Lakes. Through the efforts of the Jerome Fishing and Hunting Club, a planting of crappies was made in Trude

Lake in 1915." Whether the introduction of these two new species was a wise conservation move is being questioned today.

Forest fires were a steady diet for Mercerites between the years 1910 and 1928, when an organized fire control system began to take effect under the supervision of Forest Ranger V. A. Moon. The spring of 1925 was very dry and by the first of May the mature stands of balsam which covered the area north of Mercer were really in fine shape to burn. Early in May that day came. With a high west wind to usher it in, the fire of a party burning brush on Rice Lake, took off, across Echo Lake, almost a quarter of mile wide at this point, and was endangering the buildings on the north edge of town. Every able-bodied person turned out to fight fire. Flames were extinguished on the roof of the Krause buildings and the fire swept on, and according to Leonard Scheels, the fire jumped Oxbow Lake. The fire fighters were helpless to prevent the barn on the Dan Shea farm from going up in flames, although they managed to save the home after Leonard and Guy Wing had taken Mrs. Shea and her nurse out of the fire area by boat, up the river. By that time the river was the only means of escape. The fire finally slowed down in the wet swamps east of Spider Lake and was stopped, after burning approximately 4,000 acres.

Charles Harper, Mercer

One of the oldest "Oldtimers" in Mercer is Charlie Harper, who was here before the white pine was all cut in 1894, when Williams and Libby had a saw mill near Hanneman's Store. He owned an extra large team of oxen and logged for the Scott and Howe Lumber Company. Charlie was on the only Fall log drive I have ever heard of - from Fisher Lake to Echo Lake. Because the crew all carried rifles and hunted deer all the way down, it became known as the Winchester drive. He agrees with the rest of the oldtimers that deer were scarce 40 to 50 years ago and I'm sure he remembers one of those seasons, for in 1908, a hunter from Milwaukee

shot him for a buck. He says, "lynx, bob-cat, timber wolves, fisher, marten and mink were plentiful, but no beaver". You should hear some of his tales of his trap lines and hunting trips.

Al Seifert, Springstead

Al Seifert, and his two sons, Evert, on the Turtle Flowage, and Ervin on French Lake, have been ardent conservationists since their arrival in the country in the year 1910. Being in the resort business, they watched the trend in conservation grow from the early fish fry plantings which were shipped by train, in 1918, through the reforestration efforts of the CCC in 1933, to the growth of the forest protection division of the present date. Evert says, "The whole country burned over in 1920-1921. They fought fire for 3 weeks to save the buildings in the community and a train waited at Powell in case the people had to be evacuated. Their only tools were shovels and wet gunny sacks, and they thought everything would be under control when Ranger V. A. Moon drove out in his Model "T" and gave them back-pack-pumps to use on the fires.

Al has an interesting comparison on the roads they used to have. He left Waukegan, Illinois, on May 12, 1916 with a car and arrived at the Pripps residence on French Lake, 21 days and 3 bridges later. A lack of hi-way markers was a great problem. At Tigerton Mr. Seifert was directed to Pholx, to keep left for 27 miles; after driving 57 miles, he found himself 6 miles west of Tigerton.

The market hunters were the main concern of Frank Russel, of Park Falls, the first game warden the Seiferts met.

Leo Shoenabeck

Leo Shoenabeck arrived just in time to witness the last big white pine drive down the Flambeau River in 1905. He logged the white pine off his homestead, floated it down river to Park Falls and sold it for $12.00 per thousand. Leo learned about forest fires the hard way, for he was burned out while working

at Park Falls in 1910, just after building a new log house. To save time he bought lumber from the saw-mill town of Emerson and rafted it down river to the homestead. After Heinz started logging the hardwood and hemlock in 1912, fire was a constant threat, as people burned the slashed areas after cutting, the idea being to sell the land to settlers for farming. "Nobody gave a damn when it burned", Leo says. That land could be covered with forests now, if there had been no fires, and someone could be cutting pulp on those bare hills.

Heino Hannula, Van Buskirk

Heino can tell us both sides of the s tory on timber. Since 1913 he helped cut a lot of the original stand of timber and in 1935 he started towork for Iron County on the Forestry Committee. He estimates that 5½ million trees have been replanted in Iron County during the last 16 years. Another worthwhile project has been the replacing of 1,650 old wooden survey corners with permanent brass-capped iron pipe. "Public opinion in the early days", says Heino, "was not in opposition to the suppression of forest fires, but everyone felt that it was a hopeless, impossible task, especially in the slash area and all anyone could do was save the buildings by backfiring and letting the fire go on its way."

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According to the old files of the Iron County News there were only 162 deer, averaging 160 lbs., reported killed in 1921; in 1922, only 136 were reported killed. The reporter of that date felt this figure did not include the total kill, and thought the number killed could probably reach as high as 200. This certainly agrees with all the "oldtimers" statements that although deer were scarce, they were much larger in the old days. One of the articles went on to state that with a restricted season every two years, they would probably be able to hunt deer in Iron County for quite a few years to come.

I couldn't help wondering if the writer was still with us during the 1949 and 1950 hunting seasons.

The large serious forest fires of the early twenties were beginning to worry the people and considerable interest was being shown in the newspapers at that time. Articles were noted in most of the spring and fall issues on the need for forest fire prevention and the need for replanting of the large burned over and barren areas. By 1926 everyone seemed to agree on the urgent need for organized fire control.

Two casualties of the logging and fire days were the towns of Emerson, in the Springstead area, and the town of Busswell on the south side of Papoose Lake in Vilas County. Emerson died a natural death with the end of the white pines; lost its post office in 1916, and slowly faded out of existence. The end of Busswell came abruptly one day in May, 1917, when a fire that had been smoldering north of town for several days was brought roaring through town by a high northwest wind. The only buildings left were Tony Machyniak's home and cabin on a hill overlooking the town. These were saved by persons staying on the roofs and sprinkling them with water. Quite a town in its time, Busswell had 300 to 400 residents in its heyday.

The old records show that Wisconsin was making an effort to protect its publically owned land way back in 1911. Fire towers had been built at Rest Lake, Boulder and Lake Tomahawk, and the Indians had a fire tower in Lac du Flambeau at this early date. Henry Fruend, Pete Christensen and P. A. McDonald were some of those early Rangers.