

Musicians of Manitowish

By Kay Krans

In the early days of the Manitowish Waters region, having musicians living in the area was truly a gift for the many hardworking people. There was little or no professional dramatic or musical entertainment. Historically, people learned to play guitar, accordion, harmonica, violin and piano for entertainment for social get togethers.

Phonographs (think of the ones with crank handles) were widely available by 1913, but they were still a luxury. Radios came later, but without electricity, they had to be operated by expensive batteries. There was nothing more enjoyable than good live music, and some of the important musicians in the area were Paul Lange, Geraldine Andrews, Phyllis Andrews, the Koerner family and Anna May LaPorte.

The Koerner Family

Members of the Koerner family brought lots of music and entertainment to the Manitowish region. After purchasing Spider Lake Resort from the Buck family, the Koerner family became leaders in the community by developing tourism. They were also interested in music as T.J. Koerner had been a partner in the Koerner Brothers Piano Company in Milwaukee. Koerner purchased the resort in 1916, and as early as 1918, the family held dances with live music such as their Autumn Dance. Through the years, they built an auditorium on the property, and many an evening was spent there being entertained by professional as well as local musicians. Many of the dances had costume themes such as their Western Dude Ranch Party with the lively sound of a country violin.

Along with the resort entertainment, members of the Koerner family played instruments for the community through several generations. In 1913, Edward Koerner accompanied Paul Lange to play music at Nina Buck's party. At the 1921 Spider Lake School eighth grade graduation, Mr. Koerner directed the orchestra that played for the celebration. The March 21, 1941 PTA meeting held by Phyllis Andrews followed with cards and a musical program. Edward Koerner, grandson of T.J. Koerner, played several selections on the accordion, and his grandmother, Mrs. T.J. Koerner, played the harmonica. In addition, Lange played several violin selections.