

TALK BY MARIE PEPOWSKI, Town Treasurer, before the Manitowish Waters Historical Association March 1, 1966

THE SCHOOLS IN MANITOWISH WATERS

When Mrs. Daniels contacted me about making a report on the schools of this area, I consented with a great deal of reluctance, because I felt I had very little knowledge of this subject. However, with the help of several people; Mr John LaFave, Joe Ilg, and talking to George LaPorte and Calvin, Mrs Dickerson, Annette Riemer, John Michaelis and others, I was able to get quite a bit of information and I wish to say a hearty "thank you" to everyone that helped me. The first person I contacted was John LaFave, who was born here and who has lived here all his life. The father came here about the same time as Pete Vance. In fact Mr. LaFave told me that his father and Mr. Vance met in the woods one day and each was amazed, because each thought he was the only white man in the vicinity. The LaFave's started their Island Resort in 1888 on the island on Island Lake known as Gensberg's Island, thus becoming the predecessor of our Resort Industry. John's three older brothers went to school in Odana where they stayed at the boarding school and worked to help pay for their room and board and education. When John was about 9 years of age, he attended a school in a lumbering town named Buswell. This town was built on the most Southwestern bay of what we know as Papoose Lake. It consisted of two mills—a saw mill and a planing mill, a boarding house, store, school and the homes of the workers and the owner. Mr LaFave says that the home of Mr. Buswell was a very palatial one overlooking the lake and the town from the hill side. A railroad "Y" had been built in from Boulder Junction. One arm of the "Y" went to Buswell, the other to the North shore of Rest Lake just north of the present Camp Jörn, and it was called "Riley's Hoist". Several years later, the entire town of Buswell was destroyed by fire, and the owner moved to Oregon and started another lumbering town of the same name. John says that he knows in the woods off the shore of Papoose Lake where the concrete abutments and pieces of rods and bolts and things like that are still left from the old mill site and he says that he could take anyone there and show it to them, that it's still there in the woods. Mr. LaFave says it was over 5 miles each way to school and that is why he didn't start until he was 9 years old because his mother said he wasn't big enough to go that far. And before the lake froze over in the fall, his father rafted a pair of Indian ponies over to the island and they kept them there and housed and fed them over winter in an old ice house. Then on very cold days, the children were taken part way to school with the ponies. For several years after this there was no school in the area until a cottage at Buck's Spider Lake Resort, which we know as Koerners was used for a school for three families, the buck, LaFave, and Huntington families. This cottage stood between the present laundry and the recreational building and for many years was used for a girl's dormitory, but it has been torn down since Koerner's sold the resort. Soon after this, Max Engleman, who owned the present Deer Park Lodge, started a school in the kitchen of the lodge. He, himself, taught. This was a log building, which was

moved to make room for the beginning of the present hotel, and Mr. LaFave says the last time he saw it it was still back in the woods; he doesn't know for sure if it is still there or not. Soon after this, about the early 1900's, a school was built in the woods between Deer Park and Voss Lodge. Mr. LaFave says that the material came from the school at Buswell, but he isn't sure whether they tore it down and used the lumber, or whether they moved it, and the first real school building was built. This was a one room school, the hall or entry, as it was called, across the entire front. The first teacher was Troy Gordon of Stevens Point (and incidentally in 1913 and 1914 I attended Stevens Point college with his brother whose name was Royal). Others who taught there were Mrs Richard Sleight, Sr, about the year 1917 for two terms and she said she boarded with the Loveless family over on Alder Lake and walked from there to the school through the woods and she said they started in the morning in the winter time before it was daylight. The children would walk with her. Others who taught there were Geraldine Andrews, a Miss LaMarr, (Audrey couldn't remember what her first name was) Madeline Cario, and Phyllis Andrews, and there were others but I couldn't get any more names. Phyllis Andrews happens to be the teacher who packed up all the books and everything and helped move the school from that location up to the present location. Mr Knopp purchased the old building, and tore it down, and used the lumber to begin the place where his home and shop now is. That old school is part of that building. Among the families attending the school were Bochsons, Loveless, LaFave, Doriet, Ilg, Otto, Wilson, Johnson, Voss, Nelson, and Meyer families. There were some interesting sidelights on this period. Mr. Johnson, where Binters "Woodchuck Hollow" now is, in the winter time, used to carry Bobby on his back across the ice on Manitowish Lake. Olive LaFave and her brother Charlie, used to ride a dog sled to school. And when they got there in the morning, they sent the dog home, and the mother took off the harness, and in the afternoon, when it was about time to go to school, the dog was there to get on his harness and she would harness him to the sled and send him to school. When he got there, he barked until the girl came out and tied him till school was out, and then he took them home again. The Brown family lived where the present Oasis is now located and in the winter, they took their old white horse, picked up the other children along the way, like Ilg's children and those, drove as far as Koerner's resort where they left the horse in the barn and walked the rest of the way to the school to return that far again at night to either ride or ski behind the horse, and many times they skied or walked all the way through the woods. About the early 1900's there were two schools operating in the area. One was held in the old State House building at the site of Garbers and the Fire Tower. They didn't build a school building, the State House was used, and that was called the Rest Lake School. When I tried to find out the name of the school in the woods down by Voss's and Mrs. Sleight says when she was teaching there in 1917, it was just a certain number school district, she doesn't remember the number, of the Town of Flambeau, because at that time it was part of Flambeau, and then of course, when the school was built up here, it was called the Spider Lake School until the town name was changed, and then it was called the Manitowish Waters School. When there were enough children, those in the northern part of town went to the Rest Lake School, those in the southern part went to the one near Voss's. Two of the teachers at the Rest Lake School were Ida Peterson, and Madelin Cario, and Joe Ilg told me that in the winter months, after

Rest Lake froze over, that Nathelin and a cousin of hers that made her home with them, Mr Tario, used to bring them across the ice of Rest Lake to the school. Mr Tario was a caretaker for the Nash's. Joe Ilg says that for a few months, he doesn't remember exactly when, the school was held in one of the cabins at their resort. Now he doesn't know why, if they couldn't get the State House at that time or not, he can't remember that. He tells of his mother making a big kettle of soup and the children carrying this big kettle of soup to school with them in the morning, then the teacher set it on the stove and everybody had soup, and he said sometimes all she had to make the soup out of was potatoes, but they had potato soup. These two schools were still in use until about 1930. I can remember when I first attended school board meetings here, that they voted to close the Rest Lake school and transport the pupils to the other school. But as far as I know there never were any schools held there after we came here. About 1930 the two schools were still in use when the first part of the present school was built. This was a one room structure for grades one to eight, and now houses the intermediate rooms, the hall and front entrance, the dining room, kitchen, janitors closet, and the girl's rest room. This was called the Spider Lake School from about the time it was built until the name of the town was changed to Manitowish Waters when it became the Manitowish Waters School. The second addition was built about 1946 and houses the upper grades, library, auditorium, stage, and the boy's rest room. A little over a year ago a third room was leased from the State right behind the other building and houses the primary grades. This room has been in use a little over a year. Some of the teachers who have taught in this building, that is the first building from the time it was built were Phyllis Andrews, Nathalin Tario, Veronica Gaber, Dorothy Bruel, Miss Kelly, Dorothy Davis, Mrs. Hegberg, Mrs Bart, Mrs Ilg, Helen Malm, Mr Hodge, Mrs. Slavinski, Mr. Neff, Mrs James LaPorte, and I, myself, taught there for about 2 months. And at the present Walter Engel, John Nermy, and Mrs McKeller are the teaching staff. Besides this, a six week kindergarten is held for pre-schoolers during the summer, and a band instructor comes once each week, a vocal music teacher comes twice a week, and a cook, helper, and janitor keep things in good comfortable condition. Tow busses bring the pupils to and from the school each day, supervised playground activities see that they get plenty of helpful activities. This is a far cry from when I began teaching in 1917. I received \$40 for 20 days teaching, made my own fire, did my own janitor work, carried the water and shoveled the snow in winter. My sister, who began about four years later, and is still teaching first grade in a consolidated district, received in excess of \$7000 a year, and I might add, deserves every penny of it. I would like to close with these words:

Still sits the school house by the road, A ragged beggar sunning
and round the hill the Sumac's grow, And blackberry vines are
running,

Within the masters desk is seen, deep scared by rats official,
the warping floor, the battered desk, the jackknives carved
initial,

A charcoal fresco on its walls, its floors warn sills betraying
feet that creeping slow to school, went storming out to playing.

Long years ago, a winter sun shone over it at setting
to touch the tangled golden curls and brown eyes full of grieving
of one who still her steps delayed when all the school was leaving.

For near her stood the little boy, her childish favor singing
his cap pulled low upon his face, where cȳ and shame were
mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow, to right and left he lingered
as nervously her tiny hand, the blue checked aprong fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes, he felt the soft hand light carressing,
and heard the tremble of her voice as if a fault confessing.
I'm sorry that I spelled the word, I hate to go above you,
because the brown eyes lowered tell,

He lives to learn in life's hard school. Small few can pass
above him,
Lament their triumphs and his loss, like her, because they
love him.

Thank you.