

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.

Paul Lange

Lange came to the area in 1913 with Edward Koerner to play music at a party given by Nina Buck. Paul played violin, and Edward played the accordion. It was noted that they both made the trip to Bucks from Milwaukee. It is in the same year that Lange purchased property on Manitowish Lake with plans to build a summer home there. By 1922, he had not only built his home but had created the resort known as Lange's Sylvan Lodge. Both he and his wife were considered professional musicians, and he was known fondly by his friends as "El Maestro." For many years, Mr. and Mrs. Lange spent their winters in Milwaukee.

On April 22, 1934, their Sylvan Lodge had an intruder, and they were taken hostage by Baby Face Nelson of the Dillinger Gang during his escape from the FBI. Paul was quoted as saying, "I served for a very short time as chauffeur, but want it known that I never want another experience like that again."

Lange was an avid fisherman and a champion bait caster, so resort life was a perfect fit. He was active in the Isaac Walton Club and in 1927 won the club's sharpshooting contest. The development of the Manitowish Waters Fish Hatchery was another part of his commitment to the area. He was also extremely involved in community activities, and he would share his love of playing the violin in the evenings for various functions.

From 1913 through 1950, there are many records and stories of his musical performances in the Northwoods, including birthday parties, Red Cross fundraisers, plays and musicals at the Spider Lake School as well as the Manitowish School, and recitals for the public. During the Great Depression, he played with Gerry Andrews at many of the performances she created and directed. In 1941, live music was provided by Lange on violin, Robert Kimmell on drums, and Alice Garber playing the accordion. In 1942, the Manitowish Waters' PTA gave a wedding party

for Mr. and Mrs. Kampke (the former Miss Helen Kalanis, teacher at the school), and Lange's violin performance played the wedding march.

From 1947-1949, Lange performed with his violin for the all-women's show directed by Gerry and Phyllis Andrews. They took their show on the road to several communities from Hurley to Manitowish. Lange's violin seemed to quiet as the 1950s approached, and he passed away in 1954. Indeed, Paul Lange truly fit the profile of a Northwoods Renaissance man!