

Recalling Wild Rice and Hollywood

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from a journal penned by Lottie Rintelman in 1958 of her time on Clear Lake from 1941-1958. The reference to "Mary and Tommie" is Tom and Mary Haskins. Mary was a daughter of Dan Devine, one of the early settlers of Manitowish Waters.

"Wild Rice is a delicacy today, and well it might be when one begins to realize what tasks are involved in gathering and curing it. Wild rice has been know(n) to be the Indians friend, and we as adopted Americans have learned a great deal about food from the real natives—the Indians. For many years, the Indians have labored gathering rice, selling some and retaining some for their own use. Mary and Tommie (as his friends call him) have learned enough from their parents to follow the old methods of gathering and curing. In the late summer, they tie bunches together with a rope made from dried and cured bass wood strips. In tying it, they float their canoe close to the beds in the lake, separating it here and there into bunches so the rice can ripen and dry. In a week's time, dependant (sic) on the weather, they again go into the beds with their canoe—bend the stalks over the canoe and shake the kernels loose. It takes many hours and many days to gather a hundred pounds of rice. The rice then has to be shucked, this is done by shaking a small amount in a flat birch basket, loosening the shucks which fly away from the kernel. After this process is completed, it is left to dry and then comes the roasting process. We have watched them and fully appreciate why the price of wild rice should be what it is today. It really takes patience. First a fire is built out in the open and when it comes to the charcoal stage a small quantity of rice is poured in a tub, placed over the fire and roasted. By means of a paddle, the rice is kept stirred while it roasts to a light brown color. Then it is wild rice as we buy it in the store. How easy to cook it—what a tedious job to get it that far! It might be interesting to note that scouters from a Hollywood Studio appreciated rice gathering and curing so much that a few years ago they shot films of Mary and Tom while in the process of gathering it in Big Lake."