Bottles filled with Fort's past

By Doug Welch

Between the banks of the Rock River, northeast of Lake Koshkonong and southwest of the Bark River, lies a treasure chest of artifacts from Fort Atkinson's past. Long before the ecology movements evoked awareness to our fragile environment, rivers throughout the land were used as dumping grounds for a variety of unwanted items. Dozens of decades later, the rivers, the Rock included, have been turned into natural junk museums of sorts with the entombment of discarded objects on their bottoms.

But this shrine consists of the dark, murky cover of water and sediment that is the substance of the river. Entering the clouded museum, which blinds its visitors with its own environment of dank mire, is not an easy task. Its admission fee for visitors is persistence. Its prerequisite is the ability to scuba dive.

Two of the most frequent visitors to this museum are Fort Atkinson natives Andy Bauer and Charles Daniel of Fox Lake, Ill. Diving a river the color scheme of the Rock will never rank high on the list of popular leisure time activities. But Daniel and Bauer spend a great deal of their spare time searching the riverbed with their hands in quest of anything that feels like a discarded piece of history.

The two, working together on weekends and occasional weeknights, mostly find bottles and pottery. Glass and clay items don't give way to oxidation the way metal objects do.

"When you do this long enough, your fingers actually paint a picture of the river's bottom," said Daniel, a veteran diver of more than 20 years. "Only they don't see what you haven't touched. You're limited to what you touch and you may pass inches from a great find.

Gloved hands also make last week's bottle of Ripple wine feel like last century's clay beer bottle. Daniel and Bauer spend a good deal of time putting their hands on a bottle, bringing it to the surface with visions of a rare find, only to identify a recently-lost whiskey bottle.

But not always.

On June 1, while diving just southwest of the Robert Street bridge, Bauer put his hands on a bottle and began to surface. When he reached the top, he discovered he was holding a thick, gray clay bottle with the words "Lieb sche cher" and "Fort Atkinson" written diagonally on the top of the body.

It was the one prize which for years had kept Bauer scouring the bottom of the river. Louis Liebacher, a Milwaukee native, opened a brewery in 1861 on the banks of the Rock River between today's Pizza Villa and Papa John's. But fire struck in 1864 and Liebacher moved his operation back to Milwaukee.

Bauer had found a bottle that was between 122 and 125 years old.

"I was so excited I started jumping up and down and splashing in the water trying to get Charley's attention," Bauer said. "The people on the shore who were fishing knew I found something and wanted to know what it was."

"He found something there that takes us right back to Abe Lincoln's day," said Daniel, who found a similar bottle in the river near the city about 10 years ago. "With that find, we jump back 130 years."

Bauer, who works for the city's water department, plans to have the bottle displayed at the Hoard Museum for a while. He has no plans to sell it, although he estimated the bottle's market value to a collector could be $300 to $1,000.

"It's priceless to me," Bauer said. "If I found another, I'd probably give it to the museum."

Daniel sold the Liebacher bottle he found to a collector in Hebron. But selling the bottles for profit is not as much of a motive as is moving an artifact from its cold tomb to an environment where it is appreciated.

"Yeah, we sell a few bottles here and there to pay for a tank of air or some gas," said Bauer. "But we'd be in it for the history anyway. We enjoy diving rivers and if we find anything of historic value we try to bring it to someone's attention."

"It's a skill we attained as divers," Daniels explained. "This is a skill that we attained as divers. We'd be in the water whether we were finding anything or not. We'd have to lock in on skills that can be used while diving."

Daniel said he got into river diving about 22 years ago while diving near Sheboygan.

"I was hooked on this on the very first bottle I pulled up," Daniel said.

"At first I thought it was a Coke bottle but I went back after it and it was an original soda bottle. It had a note in it and when I opened the seal it fell out in little pieces."

Daniel took the note to a laboratory where it was pieced back together. It was a suicide note dated April 18, 1896. It was written in a woman's handwriting. Daniel said, and instructed the finder of the body to return it to the person's mother in Ohio. "Out of work — despondent" were the last words.

Since that time, Daniel has been diving rivers and lakes in Wisconsin in search of trinkets of history and mysteries of heritage. He prefers to sell any artifacts he finds and doesn't keep to local collectors so they will remain in the area. Although, he added, sometimes he has trouble even giving away things to local museums.

Daniel has found a wide variety of the river's offerings. Old guns, clay smoking pipes, tools, boat props and porcelain oddities are commonly found by Daniel and Bauer.

Bauer learned to dive when he served in the Marine Corps from (Continued on page 90)
Indian trails led way to Fort Atkinson

By Robert Angus

By land, water and air, people have arrived in or departed from Fort Atkinson in style during its first 130 years.

While transportation today is overwhelmingly by automobile, there were periods in which the prime modes of travel ranged from walking or horseback riding, to horse-drawn buggies or stage coaches, to steam-powered or gasoline-propelled boats to railroad passenger trains.

Early settlers arrived here by foot or on wagons drawn by horses or oxen, most of them coming from Eastern states after brief stops in Milwaukee. Travel for them meant tough times; for some, it meant driving their slow-moving livestock ahead through unmarked woods and over uncharted meadows.

The area's very first residents, for instance, including the Dwight Foster family and Aaron Rankin, spent seven bitter cold November days and nights in 1836 (all out "in the weather," with no rest stops at waysides or inns) on their trip here from Milwaukee. And, once those tired travelers got here, only an unfinished cabin greeted them.

Traveling in those early days was mainly over old Indian or military trails, if they happened to lead where one was going. There were no roads and no bridges across the many streams. In fact, after being here for a time, early settlers of the area sometimes still managed to get lost in the woods.

Realizing even then that fast and economical transportation was important to the well being of the newly-established Wisconsin communities and their people, and being restricted in getting from here to there by the speed of a horse, people of that era naturally turned to the mode of travel that had served man well for centuries — water.

In 1837, Increase A. Lapham was hired by Byron Kilbourn of Milwaukee to survey a route for a canal linking the Rock River (starting near Fort Atkinson) with Lake Michigan. The project was pronounced feasible and groundbreaking for the St.ile, 1900,000 project was held July 4, 1839.

However, it soon became apparent that the costly effort was not worth the gain and construction was halted in 1844 after $57,000 had been expended.

Contributing to the demise of the canal project was the belief at that time that the area would soon be served by another means of travel — the smoke-puffing locomotive. Fort Atkinson anticipated being on the route of an extension of the Mississippi Railroad Co., which already ran from Milwaukee to Whitewater. However, that railroad was eventually extended, not to Fort Atkinson, but to Milton and other Rock County areas.

Things began to improve in the public transport sector in the next decade, however. By 1844, C. Ganong Co. was operating a mail stage from Madison to Milwaukee via Cottage Grove, Lake Mills, Azitlan, Summit and Prairieville. By 1847, Wisconsin Stage Lines, with its general office in Milwaukee, included stops in Fort Atkinson on its runs to Gelena, Ill., each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, with overnight stops in Mineral Point.

Those hard-riding stages connected with "all the principal stage routes across the territory and state." So, wide travel was possible for the hardy pioneers, but few had the money or time to take advantage of it.

In those early days, too, Monmouth H. Ganong, Fort Atkinson's ninth postmaster and a Main Street merchant, also operated the Ganong Stage Coach Lines. By 1852, this area was served by a stage line running from Whitewater to Madison.

However, Fort Atkinson continued with its dream of being served by a railroad, which was far and away the leading mode of travel in the early days. In the 1850s, after the Rock River Valley Union Railroad Co. had been chartered, those dreams grew stronger. But there were many delays in expansion of that road, mainly due to lack of money. And the nation's financial panic that peaked in 1857 didn't help the cause any.

In a firm and rather desperate measure, Fort Atkinson electors voted in a special election in June 1856 to contribute $50,000 of their own funds to financially assist a railroad that would extend its service to the community.

By that time, the Chicago, St. Paul & Fond du Lac Railroad Co. had laid rails from Chicago north to Janesville and from Fond du Lac south to Minnesota Junction. But then it stopped, its resources gone. However, with a new charter and more cash, the Chicago & North Western Railroad Co. finally completed the Janesville to Minnesota Junction line in October 1859.

So, finally, Fort Atkinson had a railroad, giving a big boost to its economy and to its future. As L.B. Caswell, a leading citizen of the city's early days, expressed it: "The railroad revived the spirit and energy of our people and all went to work with renewed courage.

With the coming of the railroad, resulting in a rapid growth in population, Fort Atkinson enjoyed a large-scale manufacturing boom in the decade of the 1860s.

The railroad depot became the hub of the community, with residents gathering there to watch the arrival of the puffing metal monsters and to greet visiting strangers or residents arriving back home. Long-awaited mail also came on those trains.

By the turn of the century, the city was served by 16 passenger and freight trains each day. A big, modern depot was erected here in 1906.

Trains remained the main mode of public transport for generations. However, with improved highways, cars, trucks and buses, rail business then began to decline sharply. Passenger train service was curtailed with the drop in business; and finally, at 4:40 p.m. June 6, 1950, the last passenger cars departed the local depot, leaving the city with only two freight runs per day.

The once-proud passenger depot was acquired by the city and razed in 1975. The freight depot was next to go and, eventually, the tracks were torn up south of the city. Only occasional rail freight service is offered.

Bottle search

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1974-75, Bauer learned to rescue dive in the service and still uses his skill by showing up when word of a drowning in the area is sounded.

"The best part of this is the rescue thing," Daniel said. "People don't realize how fortunate they are to have someone like Andy here. He's a highly trained and unique diver and he knows this river."

What's Bauer's next goal now that he has found a Liebscher bottle? "I'd like to dive Peshtigo," he said.

"That whole town burnt down and they threw everything in the river."

But for now, both will continue to dive the Rock River museum in search of even more rare items.

"Jefferson and the Fort Atkinson area have been unique areas to dive," Daniel said. "For the amount of artifacts in the water, you can't go wrong."

Charles Daniel finds an old jar.

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Settlers arrived by wagons, locomotive

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to local industries now, all from the north.

With the steam-powered trains also came the steam-powered boats. As early as the 1840s, Fort Atkinson, the surface of the Rock River today is dotted only by an occasional fishing boat or small pleasure craft — almost evidence remaining of what once was heavy river traffic.

Before roads were paved and the popularity of the automobile, the river was for pleasure cruising. Each spring hundreds of boats of various sizes were launched here.

Many of those early-day watercraft were the passenger-carrying steamboats, which made runs down river to Lake Koshkonong by 1840. They added greatly to the social life of the community, with many steamers passengers going to the popular dance halls of the Hoard's Hotel, now Koshkonong Mounds Country Club or “overnighting” there.

The paddle-wheel craft, most popular during the 1850s, was the keelboat. By 1857 Capable of carrying 120 people, it had three decks and even offered a soda fountain.

A popular boat was the “Uncle Sam,” built in 1888 by Arthur R. Hoard, who also owned the hotel. A stern-wheeler, it could hold 175 passengers and deliver them from storms with side curtains. It had its own power generator, powerful searchlight and a whistle that could be heard for miles. The “Uncle Sam,” which was docked near the Main Street bridge, made its last trip in 1897 and was salvaged by three other weeks. The craft also could be chartered for private parties. The boat ride fair to the hotel was a popular activity that if one wanted to take in the complete ride around the lake.

Gasoline later replaced steam to power the passenger launches. Hoard finally docked the “Uncle Sam” for good and came out with the 40-passenger “Annie Laurie.”

Among the largest river craft were Ray Thompson’s “Water Lily,” which first was used for passengers (48) before being converted to commercial fishing use in the 1930s, and Henry Niederlander’s “General Atkinson,” which could carry 25 passengers. Another familiar craft on the river those days was the “Yellow Fellow,” built by employees of Cornish, Curtis & Greene, a large industry of that period. It could hold 35 people.

Many other boats powered by gasoline and naphtha also ran up and down river; each of the romance of water travel had vanished with the disappearance of the steamboats.

In the 1870s, there didn’t come to Fort Atkinson until much later, but local residents got their first glimpse of the “horseless carriage” in 1878 when a Steam Engine named the “ecstasy,” a contender in the great auto race from Green Bay to Madison, clanked its way through the streets of Fort Atkinson.

A large crowd was attracted to see the “novelty,” which called attention to itself via a loud steam whistle. The mighty new machine was named the “ecstasy” at that time described the cumbersome vehicle as “rather handsome,” noting that it was a cross between the automobile and steam train engine. Propelled by an endless chain, it weighed 6,500 pounds.

Not exactly a pleasure vehicle, the “Oshkosh” while here demonstrated its plow-pulling capacities on the farm of M. B. Snell. But few local residents thought it exhibited encouraging features for farm and road use.

From Fort Atkinson, the “Oshkosh” motored to Janesville, a trip it made at least 15 miles, and then it was off to Madison.

Despite their low opinions of the transportation in the city. During its first six years of existence, the city survived with a ferry (flat boat) that was first propelled by a pole and rope. Then, in 1842-43, the first Main Street bridge was erected of timbers. It was described in 1846 as being “very frail and flimsy.”

A few years later, in December 1849, a special town meeting was held at which residents voted to raise $350 to repair or rebuild the bridge.

In 1851, before the auto was invented, a steel bridge was built that had a narrow 20-foot driveway and six-foot walking path. The present Main Street bridge was erected in 1870, after residents approved funding of $50,000 for a cement structure 286 feet long. The present bridge was erected in 1896.

The first Bark River bridge was built in 1852. Early Fort Atkinson was linked by narrow streets connecting Robert Street with Milwaukee Avenue. That was relocated and rebuilt in recent years. Up until 1910, traveling in the city by any means was either dusty or muddy, for all streets were dirt and there were only a few boardwalks in the downtown section. The city’s first paved streets were made of wood blocks laid on Main Street (which tended to wash away in times of flooding). Later, macadamized and cement pavement came to the city.

Art Hoard’s sailboat at Lake Koshkonong

"Oshkosh," Fort Atkinson residents were quick to claim ownership of the first automobiles as they became available. In fact, some local residents will self-propelled vehicles of their own.

The 1896 census of Fort Atkinson revealed that 15 automobiles were owned in the city that same census, which showed that horses, mules and asses in the city totaled 294. By 1920, cars outnumbered horses etc., for the first time, went to 114.

A public-operated airport has served Fort Atkinson since 1945, when the city began to lease Mid-City Field, located between the city and Jefferson along Highway 26, was purchased by the city for $34,175 in 1977. With the expansion of the airport, there were to be improvements costing $5,000. Of that amount, the city paid $13,940, with state and federal funds making up the difference. Early days of the airport, the manager had no manager, but no more. Without a paved runway, it presently serves industrial and pleasure craft, but plans call for expansion and improvement.

Transportation in Fort Atkinson also included public bus service for a brief time in the 1940s-50s, but patronage was insufficient. Taxi service now is the only in-city public transport.

Sliced in two by the river, bridges have always been a vital link to Davenport. Milwaukee Avenue down to the Legion Dugout.

Robert Street was named after Robert Barrie, a member of one of the early families which anchored the city. Barrie Street was named after the family.

It appears the city council got bold once and even named a street after itself. Council Street runs north four north of the city on the west.

L.B. Caswell was a leading citizen in this part of Wisconsin and a former school and current street bear his name. He served as representative of the United States Congress for making his mark in many ways in local business life.

In 1994, Grant Street was conclusively adopted as the title of the avenue between South Main and the city. It is named after Robert Barrie.

Walton, McComb, Ralph, Hake, McPherson, Edward, Converse, Short and White streets were named after prominent old families in town. Some

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Germany, LaFollette streets?

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of these people annexed land to the city.

Clarence Street was probably named after early settler Clarence Curtis, who lived on what is now the corner of Clarence and North Third Streets.

Janette and Lucile streets were namesakes of the daughters of H.H. Curtis. Shirley and Harriet streets were in honor of the daughters of Frank Hoard and A.R. Hoard, respectively. These four streets are located in what was the Hoard-Curtis annexation. About 1914, Frank Hoard and Curtis annexed a total of 180 acres to the northwest part of the city.

Dempster Street was named after William Dempster Hoard, former governor of Wisconsin. He was founder of Hoard’s Dairyman and the Daily Jefferson County Union.

At one time, Drummond Craig was postmaster here. Hence the city has a Craig Street. Craig was also an early family name in this area.

The McMillen Street label originated with McMillen Brothers, who owned a slaughter house and meat market for many years.

Wilcox Street might be named after A.J. Wilcox, who was a member of the school board in Fort Atkinson for years, or possibly after Joe Wilcox, who owned the lumber yard.

Frederick and Boldt streets are named after Frederick Boldt, whose land was part of the original village. When Eli P. May annexed land to the city, he named two of the newly-created streets, Roland and Zida, after his grandchildren. They are down near the old May home on East Milwaukee Avenue. Zida was also the name of his sister.

Harry Mooradian, a native of Armenia, named a street after his homeland. It is directly west of the hospital.

Sherman Avenue was once called Germany Street, but when World War I broke out in 1917 and relations with Germany ceased, it was decided that the name of the nearby Sherman Avenue would be applied to the entire street. At the same time, La Follette Street was changed to Wilson Avenue because Sen. Robert La Follette opposed America’s entry into World War I.

Clute and Heth streets are named after families who owned land in town, and Rogers Street is the namesake of the late attorney Charles B. Rogers.

Two of the city’s newest streets, Gerald and Endli, honor Gerald Endli, Port Atkinson’s only Congressional Medal of Honor winner, who died a hero in World War II.

Converse Street remembers the pioneer nurseryman, while Grove Street was named after Jones Grove; Edgewater Road after the Edgewater Stock Farm located there and James Place and Jamesway after W.D. James.

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SERVING EVERY OFFICE NEED
Snow, twisters stormed Fort

By Christine Blumer

Although usually fairly pleasant, Mother Nature has had her nasty moods, as is evident in two "killer" tornadoes and three paralyzing snows.

The area was particularly hard hit during the 1870s and 1880s, when two twisters and one of the city's three worst snowstorms struck.

In 1878, a tornado swept through Jefferson County, mostly in the Town of Oakland, killing one man, injuring others and leaving in its path $50,000 in damages.

"The tornado . . . entered Jefferson County in the Township of Oakland from Christianas, Dane County. Here it passed across a part of Cedar Lake, and those who saw it state that the water was drawn up into the clouds, creating a sight fearful and great to behold," according to local newspaper reports.

"The water thus sucked up by the cyclone was then precipitated, with immense force, upon the land farther to the east. Gathering force with every current of air, it struck a large barn, 36-by-54, and crushed it like an eggshell. Although the house was next to the barn, it was little injured; yet the large hickory, oak and poplar trees standing all about the house were twisted into basket-stuff."

Christian Gross was killed in the twister, but he did manage to save his wife, Louise Brandel Gross, and their eight children.

"That portion in which the family were was unroofed and the beds blown to no one know's where," according to newspaper accounts. The stove was blown down, and the fire scattered about the room. The doors were so jammed together as to prevent any chance of getting out, and the family was in imminent danger of being burned alive.

"Mr. Gross, although very ill at the time, managed to get hold of a peck measure and with the contents of a small barrel standing in the room, put out the fire."

His widow, who was the maternal grandmother of George Swart of Fort Atkinson, rebuilt the farm and was called upon many times to serve as a nurse and midwife.


No one was killed, but the twister ravaged the city's industrial area, including Northwestern Manufacturing Co., which received an estimated $15,000 damage, and Cornish and Curtis, where $5,000-plus damage was done to the lumberyard and butter churn facility.

"The day had been marked by peculiar electrical disturbances," according to the Union Extra article.

"At 3 o'clock in the morning, a tremendous thunderstorm passed over the city, and at 10 o'clock a severe hailstorm came. The heavens gave evidence that the electrical forces were greatly agitated."

"The tornado is described by Mr. Will Whitney, who lives on the Madison road west of the city, who states that he saw the black funnel terror moving from the southwest, its course in the air marked by a vast mass of trees, limbs and debris. It seemed to have been moving high in the air until it came near the shops of the Northwestern Manufacturing Co., when it suddenly descended to the ground and in an instant where before was the busy hive of industry, now lies almost a mass of ruins."

"The tall smokestack of the company was snapped off like a pipe and the west wall of the same crushed in. In this shop were several young ladies and other hands employed, yet, strange to say, none were injured."

"The tin roofing of Judge Lucien B. Caswell's home was blown off, as was the steeple at the Universalist Church. Caswell's roof in places was 'crushed in like an eggshell' — still a favorite phrase by the editor after five years."

The article continued: "In less than twenty seconds of time damage to the extent of $50,000 was done, as the terrible funnel swept through our beautiful city. The work of years now lies in a dreary waste. Still, amid it all, the cry goes up on every hand: 'Thank God! Not one was killed.' And yet, it seems a miracle that there was so little injury to life and person."

According to the Jefferson County Union on March 11, 1881, "The severe storm of Sunday, 27th February, 1881, drifted the roads and railroads full, and it was only by the severest effort that the latter were cleared and the trains got in motion by the 2nd. That night it commenced snowing, and in four hours fully 10 inches had fallen. All through the night and the whole Thursday the storm raged with unabated fury, the snow falling rapidly the whole time, a high wind piling it in tremendous drifts. Friday morning the streets presented a scene which baffles all descriptions. The undrifting depth of snow was over three feet."

"But the drifts! Oh, the drifts! On Main Street, from the bridge for workers were busy all day Monday removing the snow from the streets."

Cyclone hit Fort in early 1900s.

Water Street, West, during the big snow of 1881.

July 16, 1986

three blocks south, the drifts varied from four to eight feet. On South Water Street, from the mill to the lumberyard of A.D. Wilcox and Co. the snow was piled across the street 12 feet high in some places, and this was much the condition of all streets running east and west.

"The whole of Friday was spent in shoveling paths, and after this was accomplished the streets presented a wonderful look. Deep canals were cut here and there, and the snow piled as high as it could be thrown in square blocks, giving a bold, rugged east to the scene that exceeded all winter landscapes ever seen in Fort Atkinson."

Fort Atkinson was snowbound April 15, 1921, when 10 inches of snow fell on the city.

An article in the Daily Jefferson County Union in 1949, which reports that 10 inches of snow fell 28 years ago to the day, said drifts were piled as high as six feet in some areas of the city.

In the article, Mrs. Clyde Bartlett of 320 Robert St., recalled that it started snowing April 14, 1921, and continued through the night, tying up traffic for several days.

"She recalls that the fire truck came a fire to a fire was stalled on Main Street and that the James Manufacturing Co. instructed its employees not to return to work on the following Saturday afternoon, due to high drifts," the article stated.

The lead paragraph in the then-weekly Jefferson County Union published April 22, 1921, stated, "After a week of balmy weather and just when people were thinking about spring flowers, gardens, lawns and summer, along came a blizzard which swept nearly the entire state and covered Fort Atkinson with 10 inches of snow."

The article continued: "It was by far the worst blizzard experienced in this section since 1881 . . . Snow was piled up in drifts about the city, which made walking difficult and traffic with automobiles next to impossible. Country roads were blocked and train service delayed. Farmers were forced to stop their fieldwork and say things about the weather."

Even so, the snow didn't stay around very long.

"A hot sun all day Sunday and a still hotter sun Monday melted the snow, and by Tuesday noon only a few piles of the 'beautiful' were to be seen," according to the Union.
Ernie Hausen: world-chicken-plucking champ

Fort Atkinson has had its share—perhaps more than its share—of notable sons and daughters; those who have gone on to become known nationally and internationally for their prowess in a wide range of skills and expertise.

We have had the Hoards and Fosters, Jameses and Swarts, Niedeckers and Sontaga, Sullivan and Offerdahlas. Each and every one is a fine example of the mettle of Fort Atkinson.

Yet, in all of those 150 years, our community has had only one world champion—Ernie Hausen.

Born in 1877 in Fort Atkinson, Ernie worked his way through the local school system and then worked for McMillen Bros. butcher shop, a job he held for 36 years. In addition to supplying Hausen with a living, his tenure at McMillen Bros. supplied him the training he would need to capture his world title and hold it against all comers—a man and machine—until he died undefeated in 1956, an amazing 38 years.

What was Ernie Hausen's distinction, the skill that set him apart from all others? He could pluck a chicken faster than anyone or anything alive.

In 1922, a Lake Geneva man appeared at a local poultry show and challenged one and all to a chicken plucking contest. Never bashful, the young meatcutter stepped forward. As it followed the script of a movie, Ernie denuded his bird in six seconds, well ahead of the shocked record holder. That same night, Ernie lighted fires in the at 1935, when Ernie was once again rolling past the champion and sending him back to Lake Geneva a beaten man.

Before he left, the former titlist told Hausen he would never be beat, a prophecy that held true for the next 33 years. Thirty one years after his death, with chicken plucking now a lost art, his record of 3 3/4 seconds is unapproachable.

Hausen's reign as world record holder includes victories over men from Bangor, Maine, to Denver, Colo., and from Mexico to Canada.

Among those to fall to his flying touch in 1935 was Herbrand Hausen was actively sought by championship chicken plucking king Victor Pund sack and city champ Herbert Weber. An eye-witness account of the spectacle said: "He picked one chicken in slow motion to show the technique; he picked one with his eyes bandaged to show that his fingers know their business; he wore big rubber mittens picking in a third to prove that nothing could stop him, and finally he picked the fourth in high, in 4 2/5 seconds, as a warning to his challengers."

Needless to say, history has recorded that Pund sack and Weber were sent to the Boot Hill of chicken pluckers just like all of the other young upstarts.

During his long reign, Hausen demonstrated his skills to more than 100 schools in Wisconsin, also speaking on dressing and preparing game and fish. On retirement, like many great champions, he took to the exhibition trail, appearing at festivals, carnivals and fairs across the country.

The story of Ernie Hausen: 33 years as world champion chicken plucker; the undefeated conqueror of man, machine and, by his own count, a million featherless fowl.

Lorine Niedecker’s poetry lauded

By Thomas Beebe

It is sad, but so often true, that the great we never appreciate until they are no longer with us. In February 1955, four actors read a new play, "Niedecker," written by Kroll, Denny and Bunker, an actress at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater. It seemed to be just one more step in the awakening of the world to the work and life of Lorine Niedecker.

Born in Fort Atkinson on May 12, 1903, to Henry and Daisy Kunz Niedecker, she went on to be one of the community's truly famous citizens. An obscure poetess during her life, she grew to "the Emily Dickinson of her time," following her death at age 67 on the last day of December in 1970.

Most of her life was spent in a small cottage on Blackhawk Island, unnoticed by the world although loved neighbor of her Lake Koskonong friends.

Yet, in the last few years, the world has taken note of the life and work of Niedecker. The Cambridge Quarterly Review in England, the New York Times, Time magazine, and the Christian Science Monitor are just a few of the more prominent journals that have carried serious reviews of her work.

Her works have drawn praise from such world-renowned poets as Basil Bunting, William Carlos Williams, and Richard Howard. The poetess of the decade, August Derleth, and Jonathan Williams, who said, "Lorine Niedecker is one of the best poets living—living or dead, male or female."

Writing for the Christian Science Monitor, Steven Reicher surmised that she never became a major literary success during her life because she didn't address the great visions and large human themes that literary critics revel in—she didn't lack skill, however. Niedecker wrote "flinty succinct verses filled with edges and silences."

Lorine Niedecker left Fort Atkinson for a brief time to attend Beloit College and work as a script writer for WHA, Madison. However, most of her life was spent with her parents (her father was a carpenter and tavernkeeper) caring for the invalid mother after her father died.

She led a normal life in the Blackhawk Island cabin she inherited from her father. Her marriage in 1928 to farmer Frank Hartwig ended in divorce because, as friend Gail Roubit, "He expected me to be a farmer's wife."

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Fort woman’s poetry lauded

(Continued from page 94)

Niedecker began to publish her poetry in the mid-1950s but she was never far from routine occupations. After two years at the local library, she visited New York City but never strayed long from Blackhawk Island. She scrubbed floors at the hospital and worked as a proof reader for Hoard’s Dairyman, just to “make a little money for the really important things.”

“At 60 one does foolish things,” Niedecker wrote, and in 1962 she married Albert Millen, a rough outdoorsman-turned-Milwaukee building painter. They spent four trying years in Milwaukee before returning to the shores of Lake Koshkonong.

Like her father and mother, Lorine Niedecker had heart problems. However, Al and her poetry kept her mind sharp and her body, according to Roub, “like a young girl’s.” In 1960, she said she planned on 10 “good years” to “make a fair start at getting to the bottom of it...” She fell three years short.

On Dec. 1, 1970, Lorine had a stroke. “I don’t know what’s the matter,” she told Al and never spoke again. Campfire Girls caroled her at Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital, and a long-time friend decorated the Christmas tree in her room. On New Year’s Eve she died and was buried in Union Cemetery.

Al died in 1983 and was buried next to her under a gravestone that reads: “Al Millen, husband of Lorine Niedecker.” Shortly after his wife’s death, Al mused about her life: “After she left, I thought, ‘Who is she? And what is she?’

A quarter-century later, Al’s question is still being considered. The answer — from her friends, her neighbors and her peers — is that Lorine Niedecker was among the best that Fort Atkinson sent into the world.

Main Street Fort Atkinson in 1948.

Back in 1859, farm protest against tax

Farm protests against the ever-increasing costs of education are far from new in the area.

In fact, they date back more than a 125 years.

Monday evening, Feb. 14, 1859, in the Town of Koshkonong, farmers of Koshkonong and Cold Spring met, with Giles Kinney as chairman. Object of the meeting, said Kinney, was to secure “some combination and union on the part of farmers, producers and laboring men for the purpose of protecting their interests against the numerous evils and aggressions which have been unjustly obliged to submit.”

Specifically, these “evils and aggressions” were listed as paying “a large portion of taxes for the support of the government and education.”

Farmers were urged at that meeting to “place yourselves shoulder to shoulder, and with the whole soul in the tread, march to the ballot box, the high places of power and the seats of injustice, and a better order of affairs may be attained.”

Keep those cows fenced

Back in the 1870s, people had problems of a different type. In 1874, the Union reported, “There is a strict law in force in this village against allowing cattle to run at large. We notice that some people are in the habit of turning out their cows in the morning and allowing them to feed in the streets for several hours before driving them to pasture.”

‘Times’ cover featured

Fort author Craig Rice

By Joan Jones

Craig Rice was once described by an acquaintance as being the only person he knew who could crochet, play chess, read a book and compose music at the same time — and hold a highball.

The woman who possessed that remarkable dexterity was born in Chicago in 1908. She was the daughter of Harry “Bosco” Craig, a painter and sometime adventurer, and Mary Randolph, the daughter of a Chicago physician.

Her globe-trotting parents had taken time out from their travels so that the child could be born in the United States. They left again soon after Georgiana’s birth. After being shunted around the homes of several relatives, she arrived in Fort Atkinson at the age of six.

She would spend a considerable portion of her remaining childhood years with her paternal aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Elton Rice, who resided on South Main Street. It was during those years that she added the surname Rice and dropped

Craig Rice

Georgiana. It was said that her penchant for mystery was partially due to her Uncle Elton, who liked to read her the poems of Edgar Allan Poe.

As a grown woman, she lived in Fort Atkinson, Chicago and California. She had acquired an interest in

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The American Legion Band poses at the municipal building.

Joe Dietz strikes up the band

(Editor's Note: This article on Fort Atkinson's musical history was written by Joe Dietz for Koehkonung Country Revisited. The 84-year-old Dietz, who today resides at Fairhaven Retirement Home in Whitewater, has been known as Fort Atkinson's own Music Man for decades.

(He directed military bands during World War I and afterward accepted an offer from the Red Cross to perform for military hospitals and rehabilitation camps. Back in Fort Atkinson, he directed the local military band from 1918-35 and also waved the baton for many years in the city band.

(The Barrie Park Bandshell was dedicated to Dietz in a special program in 1981.)

By Joe Dietz

Since I was born in 1891, I had little to contribute to early band history except by recalling what my father told me. He referred to the different names the band went by, such as the Fort Atkinson Cornet Band, the Fort Atkinson Brass Band and the Fort Atkinson Military Band, which carried on until 1941. My father, who was a bassman in the early years, mentioned Samuel Bridges as a director of one of the early bands. Another director was Frank Conrad, who operated the hardware store and was a trimmer by trade.

At the end of the Spanish-American War, the remains of the soldiers who died in the South, mainly from disease, were returned to their homes for burial. On those occasions, the band always turned out and played in the funeral procession to the cemetery. I well remember proudly marching alongside my dad for a short distance on those occasions. Upon entering the gates of the cemetery, the marching pace was slowed and the dirge played, and then the procession proceeded to the final resting place of the soldier.

During those early days, bands made their services available for torchlight parades at election times, particularly for national elections. One or two days prior to an important rally, local members of a particular party would go out to the marshes and pick cattails and soak them overnight in kerosene. On the night of the rally, the musicians would parade on Main Street followed by a large group of party members carrying lighted cattails. It was quite a method for whipping up enthusiasm and spirit, not only to get visitors out for the rally, but to encourage them to vote on election day.

I was told of another event which occurred back then. At that time, trombones were of the valve-type as on such present-day instruments as trumpets and cornets. Along about that time, a new trombone was introduced whereby tones were emitted by slides pulled back and forth to different positions.

The first of these trombones in Fort Atkinson was purchased by a Leo Gibson, whose father was a well-known doctor in the city. The Dahlemann Drug Store maintained a bulletin board in front of their store where special items were posted. It announced that the new instrument would be played at the next appearance of the band.

As was the custom at that time, the band marched to the end of Second Street at the Green Mountain House, formed a circle and prepared for the big event. Just about everybody in town came out to see and hear this new instrument being played. The sidewalks and street corners were packed. People kept crowding closer and closer to the performer anxious to hear music coming out of such an instrument. It was quite an event in Fort Atkinson history.

For many years, weekly band concerts were played during the summer months of June, July, and August. The concerts were played from a bandwagon moved to different blocks along Main Street. An occasional concert would be played at Barrie or Jones Parks.

In about the year 1911, an investor, T.L. Val-

erus, who was associated with the Cornish, Curtis, and Greene Co., conceived the idea of building a bandstand located on top of the Main Street bridge. The idea was prompted by a desire to avoid the congestion created by the band playing at different locations along Main Street. The idea solved the congestion admirably, but not enough consideration was given to other factors that created problems.

First of all, the music did not carry well since water attracted sound up and down the river. Secondly, traffic passing underneath the band stand was disturbing. Then too, people could not listen sitting in parked cars when the cars packed some distance away. All in all, the most that could be said for the idea was that it was a noble experiment. After one season, the bandstand was dismantled and concerts were again played from the bandwagon drawn to different locations.

I well remember the first band I was a member of, at the age of 12. There were no boys' bands in these parts at that time, so Dr. Frank Brewer, the founder of the first hospital in Fort Atkinson, directed one called the "The Creamery City Band." It was named after a large creamery owned and operated by A.R. Hoard.

The band practiced in a large barn located on the Poster Street. There were some 40 members, and they were uniformed in white, appropriate for the name "Creamery City." The band was in big demand for celebrations and parades in surrounding towns, and it received a tremendous ovation wherever it played. The band also appeared in cities like Janesville, Oconomowoc, Fond du Lac and Baraboo.

Cari Wandschneider, a superintendent of the James Manufacturing Co., directed the Fort Atkinson Military Band from 1912-15. I followed him and directed the band from 1919-35. Others who directed the band from 1906-41 were Floyd Borden from Watertown, Herman Helvig from Janesville and Victor Buelow from Jefferson. Membership of the band during those years varied from 24 to 30.

Much of the success of the band during the 1915-1935 era should be credited to the energy and effort of one of its members, A.B. (Bump) Jones. To improve the band's capabilities, Jones occasionally sought outside bandmen to strengthen certain sections of our band. He would advertise for musicians to come to Fort Atkinson and, in return for their services to the band, he managed to find jobs for them.

Jones, along with the band director, Joe Dietz, built up a large music library consisting of classical, semi-classical, instrumental solos, descriptive numbers and popular music. Few bands in

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Quilts: patchwork of Fort's 150 years

by Pat Landowski

The earliest quilters in Fort Atkinson have left behind a fantastic collection of functional and fancy quilts, many of which can be seen at the Hoard Historical Museum.

The majority of the early quilts, some of which today are in private collections, were made for daily use and for protection against the harsh winters. This is evident by the use of simple designs, homespun and leftover fabrics.

The Alma Poster quilt is a good example of the earliest bedcovers. The quilt was carded, spun, dyed and woven by Almyra Poster in 1858. The filler was horsehair from the settler's own horses, and the quilting pattern of diamond shapes was very uneven and crudely done. This piece showed the meager resources of the frontier women.

The designs of the older (100 years-plus) quilts are generally geometric with each block done in different colors from clothing scraps. Fabric was scarce and home spun was very time consuming, so every small piece of leftover fabric was utilized in quiltmaking. These were true scrap quilts.

Most patterns were created simply by folding a piece of paper into a pattern. Cardboard copies of these templates in envelopes accompany some of the quilts at the museum. These templates were passed among quilters and used many times, and the patterns are used today with contemporary fabrics.

It is obvious that many of the older quilts were done at a quilting bee. The changes in stitch length and tension show where one quilter ended and another started. The majority of quilts were done by family members, young and old.

Quilting was an important scene in early Fort Atkinson. The men would have a logging bee or barn raising and the women would meet at a nearby residence or farm to cook for the men and quilt. The quilting bee became a day for meeting with friends and neighbors. It was a family affair with most of the activity held outside, as many homes and cabins were too small to accommodate a quilt frame with eight to ten women around it.

The women had to make due with limited supplies, money and utensils in a more often than not crude, inadequate home. Most of the women were completely isolated and longed for female companionship. Hence, the importance of the quilting bee. This social occasion provided the personal interaction that was so badly needed in frontier days.

Once the quilt top, filler and batting were set on the frame, the actual quilting began. The design was usually the mutual choice of all involved. The men joined the women for a lunch in which each woman had prepared her best recipe for all to share.

By the end of the day, the quilt was completed (average 100 hours of quilting) and removed from the frame to be bound by the women. There were album quilts, freedom quilts, friendship quilts, bridal quilts and signature quilts. These were made at parties often of the same name.

Quilts were the diary of the quilter; into each block was a part of her life. Many quilts were embroidered or signed on the plain patches with dates of births, anniversaries, marriages and deaths of family members, thus leaving a history on fabric.

As Fort Atkinson grew, so did quilting. There arose a competition among quilters to create more intricate designs and stitching. As the economy rose and fabric became more available, the quality and designs of quilts improved.

A very important source of our quilting heritage comes from the local churches. The early day church quilting was for charitable purposes: ladies aid groups quilted for families who lost everything in a fire or some other disaster, while some were made for orphans or the missions. Local church groups quilted tops brought to them by customers. Many were to be raffled at church affairs, the profit being used to pay church debts.

Two outstanding quilts constructed by such groups are the Congregationalist Church Quilt of 1885 and the Oakland Church Quilt of 1890. Both quilts show ingenuity by listing within the quilt names of many of their parishioners. The names and even tiny sketches in India ink remain very visible after 100 years. The Crazy Eight, a duo card club and quilting group from St. Joseph's Catholic Church, also made many quilts.

Betsy Sears made a quilt in 1883 that is fantastic, considering the hardships of her life and the lack of resources. She constructed an appliance of exquisite beauty and workmanship. A masterpiece of handwork, it is hanging in the museum for all to see.

The names Ounwell, Sears, Foster, Westphal, Snell, Blanchard, Zwieckel, Urban, Scullin, Murthaugh, Brickson and hundreds more have left Fort Atkinson with a legacy in cloth.

Quilting continued to thrive through the early 20th Century. Designs became more intricate and detailed; complete quilt kits could be ordered from catalogs. The Victorian Era was noted for its crazy quilts made of scraps from silks and velvets which were elaborately embroidered. The 1930s brought a rage of miniature piecing and vivid colors.

Quilting was not a popular past-time from 1940-70. But it made a comeback in the early 1970s, when the

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this area could duplicate this library.

It was during this period that the band members decided to do good things for the city other than just playing music. The band sponsored the Lincoln Chautauqua, which made available to our residents high-class music, as well as nationally recognized lecturers. The band also sponsored home talent plays and minstrel shows using the talents of band member Herbert Barret's experience in directing such entertainment.

During World War I, a band was organized among older musicians in Jefferson County in order to keep up morale among older musicians and spirits and play in patriotic events throughout the county. Carl Wandschneider was the director of this band, which had 76 members. It contributed tremendously to uniting the people in support of the war and, after serving the purpose well, it was disbanded at the end of the war.

In the early 1930s, the Farm Bureau Band was organized mainly through the efforts of our local Farm Bureau. Composed of Farm Bureau members and some younger musicians, it was headquartered in Fort Atkinson. They played for many events throughout the county as well as in a series of band concerts locally. This band was under the capable direction of Stuart Anhalt. It contributed much to cementing rural and city relations throughout the county.

In 1927, the Fort Atkinson High School Band was organized through the efforts of Frank Bray, superintendent of schools, and Stuart Anhalt, who was engaged as director. The first appearance of the band was at the dedication of the Municipal Building on Feb. 22, 1928. It was given a tremendous ovation by the packed assembly.

In 1927, the city erected a bandstand in Barrie Park, which was patterned after the bandstands built for the U.S. Military service. Accommodating 25 to 30 band members, it was quite adequate for most of the band of that day. It was dedicated in honor of Bandmaster Joe Dietz.
Ode to Fort Atkinson

Kids with knack for rhyme take Fort back in time

(Editors Note: In recognition of 1896 being the 150th anniversary of the founding of Fort Atkinson, English students at Fort Atkinson High School each wrote their own "Ode to Fort Atkinson." The following authors penned their poems in Phil Schubert's American Literature, Drama, and Poetry class last semester. Spelling remains as the authors intended.)

By Tim Jung

Well that thou could see
The changes in thee
Through the years of war
With house of the land
And fighting of brotheries at hand.
Thy freedom was first ignored,
From thence where thine came oppressed.
Thy young and old fought the same,
To forge a new life and more.
Beat back the forces from whence thy came.
Looking for room more and a place to grow,
Thus sprung to life,
Through griefs and strife,
And futures unseen.
When thou beganst hast forged the land,
Clearing the way for a new beginning.
Some mistakes along the way,
With natives whom thou pushed astray,
After being made inert,
A smeared and made as low as dirt.
Your brotheries split and,
some left to fight.
To many died, for country sake.
Governed states won the war.
For better or worse, the end had come.
Some still alive returned,
To bear the burden of the land.
You trained them well,
For country sake.
For each time called the horn to arms,
your children heeded calls to arms.
From wars of worlds,
To home battles.
The countries, children you have bred
but in what path have they led?

By Cindy Olson

Here you lie in southeastern Wisconsin,
Away from the big cities.
Your atmosphere is that
Of any small town;
There's a friendliness and peacefulness,
Yet activity to be found.
Between Chief Blackhawk
And General Atkinson,
Our town's oldest heroes.
Your name was derived
As a result of their battle,
And today still survives.
Your history dates back to 1836,
When Foster was our first settler.
Eventually your population grew,
When families like Jones and May,
Decided that this would be
A great place to grow.
Wisconsin is a farming state
And Fort is no exception.
Jones Dairy Farm was our first,
And fastest-growing business.
It was the beginning of what was soon to be
A fast growing community.
We are fortunate to have
A daily newspaper in Fort.
It all began,
With a publisher named Board.
His major claim to fame, however,
Was when he became Governor.
Hundreds and hundreds of kids
Have walked the hall of FHS.
Dozens upon dozens of teachers

Have occupied the classrooms.
You have produced many fine scholars
Throughout these years.
Older homes gave been restored,
And the fort has been rebuilt.
Our museum is clearly unique,
Especially for a town our size.
All these things were done with care,
To preserve sweet memories.
The town has a mixture of people,
From farmers to businessmen.
But once a year,
Every street corner,
Every school in your domain.
The children who have
Grown up under your
Trees,
Laughed in your parks,
Learned in your buildings,
Are crying to the world
Of your growth
With each of their successes.
So do not mourn
That your history will be lost
To the graves of
Lives long gone.
You have outlived
Those who laid the rough
Foundation of your birth.
And you will outlive
Those whom you now shelter.
Yet there will ever remain
The memory of the beginning,
Now and in the trials of
The future,
Which you will survive,
And conquer.

By Carla DeGidio

Oh, little town of Fort Atkinson,
Today is your day to shine.
It has been 150 since you were born.
Take some time to sip some wine.
From the mere beginnings of the Indian Mounds,
To many smoke stacks of progressive industries.
You have struggled, You have grown.
You have accomplished so much.
Smiling faces, friendly faces,
Helpful people all around.
The small-town atmosphere
Is such a joyful place to live!
Mighty Koskikonong,
The rolling Rock River,
We can't forget the Blackhawk Fort
Which reminds us of a more serious time.
Firecrackers, dances, parades
Will fill your city with pride.
We will all celebrate with Fort Fest
To cheer you on for the rest of our lives.

By Rob McGowan

Far removed from worldly troubles,
Living isolated
In a northern town.
Does anyone remember
A sweltering afternoon
In a field in Tennessee?
Does anyone remember
A festering hole in the ground
On the plains of Belgium?
Does anyone remember
A cold night in December
In another northern town?
Does anyone remember
A dripping Asian jungle?
Fort Atkinson is far removed
From worldly troubles.
There is a lonely rock
That stands mute on a green hill.
It only speaks to those who approach it.
The rock remembers
The city's sons,
Who believed their cause was worth dying for.
Max Krebs; time passes.
James Short and Delos Piper; time passes.
Wilbur Converse; time passes.
Heimer and Walter Krecskow; time passes.
Douglas Maas; time passes.
George Dailey; time passes.
Once a year, in a northern town,
We drag ourselves to the hill
And stare silently at the rock.

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Neal Rogers (Hasel)

They all come together
At our festival
With a spirit that lasts all year.
The flowing Rock River
Continues to be an attraction
To fishermen, boaters and nature lovers.
It divides the city
With its curving banks,
And adds to the beauty of the town.
Your face has changed
Throughout these years
As people have come and gone.
The generations have passed,
And now, at last,
You're 150 years old.

By Kathy Rose

150 years you have stood
Proudly
On the banks of the Rock River.
Yet it is only for 17 of these
That I have been a part of you.
I have not seen the
Gradual metamorphosis
From a lonely,
Rough-beaten structure
Standing in grim defiance
Of the unknown,
To a thriving town,
Its beat the pulse of a
Mature midwest.
I cannot praise through
Experience the
Things that were,
But only those that are now.
Yet your success is written
On every building,