

## PART FOURTEEN: RECREATION AND AMUSEMENT

by Mrs. Harley B. Rue

In 1866 when Mt. Horeb, or "Horeb's Corners", was located on the east side of town near the cemetery, indoor recreation was held largely in the basement of the Methodist Church. This basement was the scene of church suppers, oyster stews, sociables and lectures, and a weekly singing school was conducted there by Ben T. Rogers. It was the only public place available at that time for large group gatherings, and classes were conducted there while the school was under construction. Thus the old Methodist Church served a need in the history of Mt. Horeb as its first community center.

Other forms of recreation not appropriate for the church, such as card parties, dances, candy pulls, and games, were held in the homes of the residents. After the school building was completed, recreational activities were held there, including dialogues, lectures, charades, spelling bees and essay contests.

Baseball playing (using a board and a rag or cord ball), croquet, and horseshoe pitching games were among the outdoor sports in which early residents participated. The 17th of May (Norwegian Independence Day) and the Fourth of July were occasions for these activities which were attended by people of Mt. Horeb and the surrounding area. Bowery dances were also held on special celebration days.

After the coming of the railroad in 1881, a definite change occurred in the social life of the town. Several of the old town businesses were moved to the present village site, and many new places of business were erected in the new town. A large hall above the Halvor Nelson saloon was the scene of public dances and shows of various kinds, including wrestling matches and masquerades. On March 14, 1885, Ringling Bros. Shows performed at the roller rink in the Nelson Building to a capacity crowd. Roller skating was then becoming a popular indoor sport.

By the late '80's Thompson Hall (over the Andrew Thompson furniture store on East Main) had become the center of much recreational activity. The hall had a large stage with stage scenery and two dressing rooms. Before long Mt. Horeb had regular "theatrical troupes" playing six evening runs with a different play every night. Medicine shows selling Cactus Oil "pain killer", hypnotism shows, amateur shows, lectures and dances were also held in Thompson Hall.

Baseball was formally organized here on May 2, 1885, when a meeting took place at Elver's store for those interested in the sport. The team, known as the Mt. Horeb Stars, was captained by Frank Gilbert, and Adolph Elver was secretary-treasurer. Another baseball team, the Gray Eagles, was formed in 1890. The Boston Bloomers played the Gray Eagles here in May, 1904.

Some of the team members were: Vernon Bes-tor, Isaac Fosshage, George Harmon, Joe Harmon, Martin Holum, Alfred Krogh, and H. C. Wagner.

A half-mile track was situated in the area now known as South Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Streets. The track was used for both bicycle and horse racing, with some of the horses being owned by Fred and Martin Riphon and Dennis Murphy. Bicycle racing was a popular sport in Mt. Horeb around 1894. The racers, known as the Mt. Horeb Wheelmen, participated in several kinds of games, such as the two-mile handicap, six-mile relay races, and inter-club championships. Some of the Wheelers were: Gabe Anderson, B. H. Grinder, D. E. Murphy, Olaus Peterson, A. G. Paulson, George Rockstad, and E. E. Sater. Olaus Peterson was one of the cyclists who earned \$800 as a racer and participated in events at Black Earth, Dodgeville, and Mineral Point.

The Red Path Lyceum tent show and the Chautauqua shows held summer programs in Boeck Park, the site of our present swimming pool. These tent shows furnished superior entertainment for the townspeople; season tickets were sold in advance sales, and most performances were "sellouts".

In 1895 the Opera House Building was erected by a stock company. Performances by theatrical troupes, dances, political rallies, and home talent contests were held at the Opera House Hall. Continuing moving picture serials, such as "The Million Dollar Mystery", were shown every weekend; regular movies were shown during the week. Dan F. Kelliher was the manager. Movies, first held in the Opera House Hall, continued to be held in the Parkway and Strand theatres. The Strand theatre, now managed by Floyd Albert, is at present Mt. Horeb's only theatre.

In July, 1885, six balloons were released by H. G. Elliott on the corner where Hoff's store is now located. Attached to each balloon was a note informing the finder that he would receive a free one-pound bag of tea if the slip were returned to Mr. Elliott. In September of that year, an item appearing in the **Mt. Horeb Weekly News** stated that a Winnebago Indian from Lake Superior had found a balloon and started out on foot to collect his bag of tea.

In September, 1885, two trained bears were brought to town and performed on the street. Another enjoyable form of entertainment for young and old alike was the occasional visit of an organ grinder and his trained monkey.

Torch light parades were held during political campaigns. Marching participants carried lamps on poles and sang campaign songs.

North of town a swimming pool was formed by damming up a small creek that now feeds

Stewart Lake. This was a favorite spot for the boys of the town—with the last one in dubbed “a sissy”.

The men of the town enjoyed turkey shoots at Thanksgiving time. The marksmen would stand at the end of the railroad depot platform and shoot at turkey heads protruding through a hole in a box. Jule Bok (yulabok) was a favorite Christmas and New Year's season stunt. Young and old would dress up in strange costumes to conceal their identity and call on their friends. Fun and treats would follow.

Ice cream socials, usually sponsored by the Ladies Aid of the Methodist Church, were held on the corner of North Third Street (now American Legion property, formerly owned by Andrew W. Gordon). Home-made ice cream was furnished by Mrs. Andrew Hoff, Mrs. A. Gordon, and Mrs. Will Britt.

A favorite Sunday afternoon pastime for the young people was meeting the 4:30 p.m. passenger train and seeing their friends off to school or back to work at Madison.

Fourth of July celebrations were usually ushered in by the anvils from the Sam Thompson blacksmith shop. The handle hole was filled with powder and placed between the two anvils, and the touch of a streak of powder with a hot rod would produce a noise that could be heard at great distances. Bowery dances, with lemonade for refreshments, were important parts of the festival. The program always began with the reading of the Declaration of Independence, often read by Albert O. Barton, former Dane County Register of Deeds. In the early 1900's one of the outstanding acts on the entertainment program held at Boeck's Park was the release of a large gas-filled balloon. A woman was carried aloft in the balloon to descend later by parachute in the woods north of town, where she was picked up by members of her group. Fire crackers, torpedoes, and sparklers were enjoyed by the children. The Fourth of July celebration of 1914 was attended by twenty-five hundred people.

Mt. Horeb's first band was an organization called the Blue Mounds Brass Band. J. P. Moe, father of Jorgen Moe, and a painter and paper hanger by trade, helped organize this band in the latter part of the 19th century and directed it for many years.

Gypsies were frequent visitors to Mt. Horeb around 1912, and there would generally be three or four wagon-loads filled with women and children. The gypsies were never allowed to make camp inside the village limits and were under constant surveillance by the townspeople while they were in the area.

The first Harvest Festival was held in Mt. Horeb in September, 1921. Fred H. Hanneman, director of the Civic Band, who had recently moved to this community, initiated the idea; and the Civic Band, which was composed of local businessmen, became the sponsors of the festival, which was designed to create good will be-

tween the town and country folks. During these miniature county fairs the farmers and their wives, as well as the townspeople, would display their work and produce. Vegetables of all kinds, flowers, livestock, crocheting, tatting, embroidery, quilts, home-baked foods, and canned foods were displayed and prizes awarded. Nora Evans was the first chairman of the Women's Culinary Display.

This Harvest Festival, or Fall Frolic, was eagerly anticipated by both town and rural people. Festival Queen contests, grandstand performances and pageants, school displays, business displays and 4-H contests were highlights of these festivals, as were the concession stands and rides and the Bingo games. After 1954 the Harvest Festivals were discontinued.

In the year 1912 Golmar Brothers, Barnum and Bailey's Circus came to Mt. Horeb with their own circus trains around three o'clock one morning. Many of the townspeople met the train and watched the unloading of the parade wagons and the trained animals, which were then removed to the circus field, land presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Joe Murphy. Other circus sites in Mt. Horeb were the area now known as Center Avenue, the farm land of Henry T. Thompson, now South Eighth Street, and the present Roy Tvedt land near the Stewart Park entrance.



The Ski Slide and a small part of the crowd present at the ski tournament Feb. 24, 1914, at Lake Park.

In 1914 a ski jump was built on top of Stewart Park hill, the entrance to the Park. This jump was considered one of the best in the country with large crowds attending the meets, including spectators from Madison brought by special train. Some of the world's finest skiers participated, including Ragnar Omtvedt, world's champion skier, from Norway. Others were Anders Haugen, Anders Olson, C. Landvich, E. Landvich, Lars Haugen, Sigurd Hanson of Chicago, Alex Hendrickson of Blair, Wisconsin, and David Lind, Barney Reilly, Einar Lund, and Ole Gundersen, all of Mt. Horeb. In 1920 the ski tower was removed and taken to Madison to be erected on university property.

In June, 1952, a membership charter was granted to the Mt. Horeb chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America. Sever Martinson was the organizer of this group, which numbered about thirty, with Arnold (Bud) Byrne as the director. The ladies counterpart of the SPEBSQSA, known as the Sweet Adelines, was organized about the same time and had a membership of about twenty-five.

School activities are an important part of the recreation in Mt. Horeb, and sports events have continued to increase in importance. As a member of the Southwest Wisconsin League, Mt. Horeb High School has participated in football, basketball, baseball, and track events. Indicative of the desire to promote school and community athletic programs, was the organization in 1956 of the Mt. Horeb Booster Club. Class plays, homecoming, forensic contests, band and chorus concerts, Christmas programs, spring music festivals, and commencement activities are highlights of the school year. The playground provides swings, slides, tennis courts, and athletic fields for the children. In recent years floodlights were installed on the football field to provide illumination for night football and baseball games.

The Norsemen Chorus, consisting of twelve men, was organized in 1934 by Trygve E. Thoresen. Fred H. Hanneman was the director, and the group was accompanied by Albert A. Austin.



Ski Jumpers in front of depot awaiting their train. Second man in bottom row is Ragnar Omtvedt, Norway's champion jumper. At his left are Barney Reilly and his one-armed ski pal, David Lind.

Arthur Bloland, Philip Fosshage, Wallace Fosshage, Gay Gesme, Isaac Gesme, Sever Martinson, Dr. E. J. Mithus, G. C. Osmundson, Owen Paulson, Edwin Offerdahl, Dr. A. S. Thompson, and Trygve Thoresen were the members of the chorus. In 1936 they presented a minstrel show; five performances were given, some in neighboring towns. Sid Thoresen, Chicago, brother of Trygve Thoresen, was a guest soloist with the chorus on several occasions. The group sang over radio station WIBA, at the Martin Luther Home in Stoughton, Old Folks Home in Verona, and Lake View Sanitarium in Madison, and at church programs and services in Mt. Horeb, Daleyville, Madison and Stoughton. They also introduced the song "Solitude" composed by Fred H. Hanneman, with Wallace Fosshage as soloist.

The nine-hole Mt. Horeb golf course is enjoyed by golf enthusiasts from surrounding communities as well as by the townspeople. Ladies Day events and annual championship tournaments are held each year. In the summer of 1960 a new eight lane bowling alley was added to the clubhouse. It is now known as the Mt. Horeb Golf Bowl, and operated by Ron Wirth. There are two other bowling alleys in Mt. Horeb; Phip's Alleys, operated by Philip Hoff, and Corella's Alleys, operated by Corella Comiskey.

Mt. Horeb's swimming pool, located in Boeck's Park, was completed in 1954. This modern pool with excellent bath house facilities, trained lifeguards and safety regulations had long been a dream of Mt. Horeb citizens.

The Folklore Village Festival, the first of its kind in the region, has been held in the high school every year since 1948. The event takes place from December 28 to January 1. More than sixty participants come from Colorado, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Illinois, Virginia, West Virginia, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The main theme of these festivals is built around the colorful customs and traditions surrounding the holiday season that are brought to this country by different nationality groups. The former Jane Farwell originated the festivals, but they are now supervised by a board of six directors from various states who are elected each year from the attending membership.

A Mt. Horeb Flying Club was organized January 6, 1958, after Clarence Gonstead built the Mt. Horeb air strip. The original members were Ralph Buechner, president; Gay Sutter, vice president; Windy Hoffmaster, secretary; Buster Finke, treasurer; Bob Gerber; Bud Post; Ed Post; John Wittwer; Donald Evenson; Jack Wirth; Joe Schmitz.

Club members have flown about 1,050 hours and approximately 84,000 miles. Five members have received private pilot licenses; eight have received student pilot licenses. There are 17 members at present.

The Sutter's Ridge Ski Club, about 3 miles north of Highway 18, on the Little Norway Road, was opened in January, 1959, by Sandy Steven-

son, who came from Chicago. With snow-making equipment, a 300 ft. vertical drop, four open runs from 1000 to 1700 ft. and a 1200 ft. T bar, the club offers excellent facilities for area skiers.

Other attractive features are a spacious lodge, ski shop and rental shop, and skiing instructions by Roy Asherlund. The club's season runs from December 1 to March 15.



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