Bits and Pieces of Life in the Town of Menasha
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Cemetery Histories

The Town of Menasha is home to several cemeteries that possess a long and rich history of the area.

The oldest cemetery in the Town of Menasha is St. Patrick's Cemetery, located on N. Green Bay Rd. This cemetery was in its earlier years referred to as the "Old Irish Cemetery." The earliest burials were those of Irish pioneers and early German, Canadian and Belgian Catholic settlers from the Towns of Menasha, Clayton, Neenah, Vinland and Winchester.

St. Patrick's Cemetery on N. Green Bay Rd. Author.

The Fox-Irish Cemetery was an earlier Catholic graveyard that was located along Clayton Ave. in the Irish Colony. It was a "lost cemetery" associated with St. Malachy Mission Church (1849-1857), located somewhere on farmland that was owned by Louis Kruse. The exact location and who is buried there is unknown. St. Malachy Church was the forerunner for St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, which later changed names to St. Patrick's Church.

St. Mary's Cemetery, located along Racine Rd. on the east side of Little Lake Butte des Morts, was once farmland belonging to Amos Page. The church purchased this parcel of land in 1867. This cemetery has two distinctions about it: first, it is the only cemetery in the United States to have active railroad tracks running through it.

Railroad tracks dividing St. Mary's Cemetery on Racine St. Author.

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Secondly, St. Mary’s Cemetery is also home to a soldier that served in the Invasion of Russia of 1812 under Napoleon Bonaparte. There is a plaque erected on the grave marker of the soldier, Peter Stilp. It is unknown how Mr. Stilp came to lay to rest in the cemetery.

Grave stone of Peter Stilp, a Russian soldier buried in St. Mary’s Cemetery. Author.

St. John’s Church maintains two cemeteries in the Town of Menasha. Cemetery No. 1 is located on the corner of Midway and Racine Rd. and No. 2 is located on Valley Rd. No. 1 was founded and purchased in 1896. At that time, cost of a lot was $8 for an eight grave lot. Single adult graves were sold for $2 and graves for babies were $1. The large Crucifixion monument was constructed in 1952 at a cost of $1,200. Cemetery No. 2 was acquired in 1895. This cemetery has recently been expanded for future needs.

St. John’s Cemetery No. 1 on Racine Rd. and Midway Rd. Author.

The City of Menasha purchased land just east of Oak Hill Cemetery, alongside North St., and maintains Resthaven Cemetery at that location.

SOURCES: St. Mary’s Church
St. John’s Church
Town of Menasha
City of Menasha
THE CONCERT THAT NEVER HAPPENED

The Cinderella Ballroom was known for having “top-notch” entertainment over the six decades that it operated in the Town of Menasha. The bands that played there were always quite popular at the time of their performance and generated large crowds from all over the Fox Valley and northeastern Wisconsin.

However, there was one concert tour, which is still talked about across the nation, which was scheduled to play at the Cinderella Ballroom. In February 1959, the Winter Dance Party tour was scheduled for an afternoon performance at the Cinderella Ballroom. This tour consisted of several popular acts of the time: Ritchie Valens, Buddy Holly, J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper), and Dion and the Belmonts.

The tour had just finished a show in Duluth, Minnesota, the night before and was supposed to travel by bus to the Cinderella Ballroom for an afternoon show and then on to Green Bay for an evening show at the Riverside Ballroom. The tour’s bus broke down outside of Hurley, Wisconsin, and the band was unable to reach the Cinderella for that afternoon’s show. This put owner Charlie Maloney in a “bind.” According to the Feb. 3, 1959 issue of the Post-Crescent, Maloney had expected 2,000 kids to attend. He instead ended up booking a local rock ‘n’ roll band and charging 50 cents admission.

The tour did eventually reach their performance in Green Bay and went to Clear Lake, Iowa for their next performance. After that show the group was tired of traveling on old, unheated buses and chartered a plane to fly them to their next performance in Moorhead, Minnesota. Only three members of the tour went on the plane: Richie Valens, J.P. Richardson, and Buddy Holly, with the rest continuing by bus. Shortly after take off, the plane crashed in a field outside of Clear Lake, Iowa, killing all the passengers.

Maybe if their bus had never broken down on their way to the Town of Menasha, the group would have continued to use the bus as travel, and the lives of these popular musicians would have been saved.
Newspaper ad for the Cinderella performance of the Winter Dance Party. At right, the Post-Crescent article detailing the cancelled performance and plane crash. Ed Maloney and Appleton Post-Crescent.
EARLY TOWN OF MENASHA SURGICAL PIONEER

Dr. John B. Murphy, son of early settlers Michael and Ann Grimes Murphy, had grown up on a farm west of Little Lake Butte des Morts in the Town of Menasha. Dr. Murphy was a vocal dissenter of early surgical practices. He claimed that early operative treatment was the way to save a life.

Dr. Murphy’s leading contribution to surgery was the development of the “Murphy Button” in 1892. According to “The Story of Medicine in Wisconsin,” a major surgical obstacle revolved around the problem of how to unite the two open ends of the intestinal tract. Sewing the intestines together was dangerous because often the stitches would not hold or would form scars that blocked the passage.

Based on the principle of the dressmakers snap fastener, the intestinal ends could simply be snapped together using a button. As the ends healed, the buttons would be passed from the body, leaving an unscarred opening the size of the button used. This technique proved to be very successful and was immediately adopted by the prestigious Mayo Clinic.

Dr. Murphy continued in his research of surgical procedures, stressing the importance of pre-operative procedures in appendicitis and also worked on gynecological procedures.

SOURCE: Oshkosh Northwestern
Fact or Fiction: ‘Hill of the Dead’

Many history books, even the beginning of this book, tell the story of the Fox Indian battle that occurred near the area of present day Fritse park. I have read numerous accounts of this incident, some differing slightly, but all stating that it occurred in Little Lake Butte des Morts in the Town of Menasha. However, according to archeologists, they say that the incident never occurred in the Town of Menasha, but south of here, in Lake Butte des Morts near Oshkosh.

Historians tell us that the Town of Menasha is the site of the battle. This being derived from documented stories and the many different historians that continue to “pass this on.” These stories can trace themselves back to the Menasha historian, Publius V. Larson, who wrote many books on the history of Menasha and Winnebago County. Since then, many later historians, such as Bill Herziger, have continued this. They rely on information that originally comes from stories of the people that were either there or had direct knowledge of this incident.

On the other hand, if you were to speak to an archeologist, they would tend to differ with this account, stating that by conducting archeological digs, they are finding evidence of a battle occurring at the Oshkosh site rather than the Town of Menasha site. Interestingly, Winnebago County has the second most documented archeological digs, behind only Dane County, in the state!


Figure 20. Artifacts from the Fritse Park site (47 Win 395) Row 1 a, projectile points; Row 2 a, scraper; b-c, Oneota sherds; d, Woodland sherds; Row 3 a, historic “toadstool” pipe bowl fragment; b, U.S. Corps of Artillery button (1871.)
According to Richard Mason, an Adjunct Researcher for the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh, there have been no documented findings of artifacts to show that the battle occurred in the Town of Menasha. There have been many archeological digs in several locations along the west shore of Little Lake Butte des Morts. There have been arrowheads, tools, and pottery located, all indicative of an Indian village, but no signs of a “war” or “battle” occurring at that location. Of interesting note, Richard Mason had located a U.S. Corps of Artillery button (circa 1812), which would lead credence to Governor Cass meeting with the Indian tribes at that location.

Archeologists have conducted digs in Oshkosh along Lake Butte des Morts, and at a particular location, known as the Bell site, have found evidence of a battle occurring at that location. At that site, along with arrowheads, tools and pottery, they have located cannon ball fragments, gunflints, flint locks, beads and knives, all of which would lead someone to believe some kind of confrontation had occurred there.

So, believe what you will!

SOURCE: Richard Mason
Ghost Legends

Valley Rd.

Legend has it that there is a tree that overhangs Valley Rd. where one can often see the ghost of a man hanging from the tree. Presently, the only tree that overhangs Valley Rd. is located at the corner of Valley Rd. and Theresa Ave. in Palisades Park. The tale starts approximately 100 years ago, when a young groom was riding his horse buggy along Valley Rd. and was in an accident, thrown from the carriage, into a tree and hung by his bow tie. People say that on certain nights, you can still see the ghost of the young groom hanging from the tree.

Secura Insurance

The headquarters of Secura Insurance was originally in the Town of Menasha when this legend is said to have started. On the property of Secura Insurance is a pond. Legend has it that in the late 1800s, a family was having a picnic near the shore of this pond when their young daughter fell into the pond and drowned. There are certain nights when one can still hear the screams of the young girl and her family.

One note to consider is that the pond is man-made and was built when the building was constructed sometime in the 1960s!

SOURCE: Interviews with local residents
"Green Patch" Spot for Couples

As reported on the Twin City News-Record, July 23, 1981

"The "green belt" areas that separate the cities from colliding in the Town of Menasha are disappearing, and it has been quite awhile since portions of them were noted for their "lover's lanes."

During the 40s and perhaps before, the river banks were popular places with the teens. Like "Inspiration Point", made known through the television series "Happy Days", the Richies and Cindys of the Fox Valley often went to the Green Patch after a school dance or to pass time of a summer day in a pastoral setting.

Green Patch was the river bank area at what is a portion of the Palisades area on the east side of the Fox River. It may have been a part of the Gmeiner farm, according to old-timers. Green Patch earned its name because viewed from the west shore of the river, the Pierce, Lutz and Alicia park areas, the high banked fields looked emerald green in the spring and summer sunshine.

After World War II, the area became known as one of the prettiest and most popular places for home building and the Green Patch disappeared. It's not unlikely that some of the kids that once drove their old Fords into the Green Patch, with their blankets and carton of Cokes, later made their homes there.

Another lane, this one on the opposite side of the river, also was lost to the starry-eyed girls and moon-crossed boys that were lovers in the past when, according to an April 1951 news story, home owners in the area protested being disturbed by the late-night lovers and frequent checks by the town constable, making the place unpopular. That was the Frederickson's woods area, described as old Highway 125, east of U.S. 41, along the west shore of Little Lake Butte des Morts. Said one resident, 'It's not safe to go down that way anymore.'

However, if cars parked along the way had their lights on, it was possible that they were meeting laws about parking on posted 'no parking' roadways and the constable could not ticket them. Sometimes, the area could have been a gold mine for any enterprising young man with a car in running condition, a strong battery, and jumper cables!

SOURCE: Twin City News-Record
Hidden Treasure

While working on locating old photos to include in this book, I made a startling discovery of some “hidden history.” At the Cloverleaf Cheese Factory, I was meeting with the current owner Lisa Howard and was working on taking reproduction photographs of several old photos of the business that are in a rather large frame hanging in the entrance way.

We removed the back of the frame to remove the photos and found a large, very colorful, certificate that was written in German. After examining it for several minutes, we were able to come to the conclusion that it appeared to be a marriage certificate.

It listed the groom as Georg Velte and the bride as Anna Mundinger. It was dated July 10th, 1896, and it indicated the marriage occurred in the Town of Bloomfield in Waushara County.

German marriage certificate found behind a picture frame at Cloverleaf Cheese Factory. Author.

Lisa Howard was unfamiliar with either person and said that her family was Irish and, furthermore, all of the people who lived in this area were Irish.

She was uncertain as to why a German couple’s marriage certificate was neatly tucked away in a picture frame in an Irishman’s cheese factory!
HOME DAIRY

As written by Barb Genett

The Strohmeyer family ran a small dairy business out of their home on what is now Coldspring Rd. After the marriage of their daughter Catherine to Carl DeLapp, the dairy was moved to Highway 41 where it grew into a medium-sized operation.

Home Dairy employed several workers, including Charles Heath, who married Nelda Schumann of the Schumann family on Coldspring Rd. A dairy bar was also a part of the dairy location, and it was a treat to have a malt or ice cream cone at the counter on a hot summer afternoon. The dairy also ran two or three milk delivery routes in the Neenah and Menasha area. One way of advertising was to have a customer’s young toddler pictures with a Home Dairy product. This would run in the local newspaper and was a big hit.


Home Dairy ceased operations when the property it sat on was sold for the expansion of Highway 41 in the 1950s. Some of the employees, including Charles Heath and Mel Peotter, transferred to Gear Dairy in Menasha.

SOURCE: Barb Genett
May 21, 1849
Neenah, Wisconsin

Dear Family,

You do not know the trouble I’ve had. Now I must write this in haste, for the post goes but once a week. I have traveled much and hard, but I now bought 160 acres of the finest land in AMERIKEE. It’s enough for all of us. It’s all timbered except 8 acres cleared by the first owner who lost it cause he couldn’t make the payments to the State of Wisconsin. I am putting in potatoes, beans, corn, etc. There will be plenty for all of us over winter. Now be ye not employed, come on with ye, as fast as ye can, for the State is filling up fast convert all but beds and clothes to gold for money is very valuable here. Have 4 acres of winter wheat coming fine. Was planted last fall by previous owner. Plenty of all. Bring $300.00.

HOW TO GET HERE – Take the Hudson river north to Albany, New York, than the immigrant train to Buffalo then take steam boat through Lake Erie and Lake Huron and into Lake Michigan, then down the west shore to Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Write when ye get this letter and I’ll meet ye there. Now, be I not able to meet ye there, take the wagon trail to Fond du Lac and then north to Neenah.

It’s 70 miles by wagon from Sheboygan to Neenah. When at Neenah, go to Bridy Scanlon’s store. She knows where the farm is – about five English miles from Neenah. Write as soon as you get this – address it to Neenah P.O. to be picked up by me there. See ye at Sheboygan or Bridy’s in Neenah.

PLEASE HURRY.

SOURCE: Grimes Family
JESSE JAMES GANG RIDES THROUGH THE TOWN.

Arvin Sell tells of a story that he has been told numerous times in his younger years regarding the infamous Jesse James gang. Over by Schildt Park, there is a small creek that runs through crossing under Coldspring Rd. and widening into a small pond before continuing eastward to Little Lake Butte des Morts. That area was once owned by the Schildt family, but prior to that was owned by Ed Hansen.

Ed Hansen's grandfather tells of the infamous Jesse James gang that rode through the Town of Menasha sometime in the 1800s and had camped out near this pond on the Hansen property for three days in order to give their horses and themselves a rest from traveling. According to these stories, the gang was on their way to Green Bay and then, ultimately, Minnesota. The group of men were described as being very courteous and "nice young gentlemen". They had gotten some milk and eggs from the Hansen farm and paid for everything they took.

There have been several historical accounts of the Jesse James and Cole Younger gang being involved in a bank robbery in Northfield, Minnesota in 1876 that resulted in several members being shot and the Younger gang captured. It is said that the gang had traveled to Minnesota from Missouri, some saying by horse, others by train; however, there are accounts of the James gang fleeing Minnesota, going through Wisconsin, and ending up in Kentucky. This would possibly put their travels through the Town of Menasha on their flight from Minnesota. I have checked with various Western historians who have been unable to refute this story but say that it is possible!

Jesse and Frank James, 1872.

SOURCE: Arvin Sell
**Lady of the Fox River**

Rosemary Bruehl (Catlin) has lived on the Fox River her entire life. She was recently honored for that by the Friends of the Fox organization. Her parents moved to Appleton in the early 1900s, living on the Fox River. Her father, George Catlin, was an avid duck hunter and in order to hunt near the river, one had to own land. George was employed by the Milwaukee Road railroad as a bridge tender near Memorial Dr. in Appleton. He was given a house by the railroad down on the river, known as a “railroad house.” This home was located down on the banks, and Rosemary remembers that “it was 86 steps to get up the hill to the street.”

This home was situated only about 3 feet from the actual tracks. Rosemary recalls vividly that the cupboards would shake, and cups would fall each time a train went by. The Catlins also raised chickens which would pose a problem whenever trains came by. “Mother would tell us to grab a broom and go outside and chase the chickens away.” “Some nights we would be having chicken if they weren’t fast enough.”

![Image of a house near railroad tracks.](image)

The "railroad house" of the Catlin family. Located along the railroad tracks, below the Memorial Dr. bridge in Appleton. *Rosemary Bruehl.*

The bridge tender had a rather busy job. The role of the bridge tender was to change the positions of the railroad bridge, either allowing a train to cross the river, or a boat to pass through. The bridge tender would work hand in hand with the lock tenders in Appleton and Menasha to advise each other of boats headed their way. Rosemary recalls that the bridge and home were run off the same power. When the bridge had to be moved, George would “unplug” the home and “plug in” the bridge.
Rosemary also remembers her father renting rowboats during the 1920s and 1930s. At the time, there were not many cars around, and “if a guy wanted to take his gal for a ride, he would rent one of the rowboats for the day.” George Catlin worked for the railroad for 58 years. If an employee worked for over 50 years, he received a “golden pass” which entitled him to free travel by rail for life. Rosemary remembers traveling to Milwaukee with her family and the train conductors being amazed at her father’s “golden pass.”

In 1941 Rosemary and her husband Richard purchased land on Lakeshore Dr. She remembers being the second home there, having the Beck farm to the north and the Page farm to the south. They had a difficult time obtaining a loan for the property, being asked by several bankers why they would want to live on the land by the river, calling it “swampland” and stating that it would never be worth anything.

Richard Bruehl was a carpenter/finisher by trade and had done a lot of the carpentry and finishing work when the current Springroad School was constructed. Rosemary’s most memorable events from living on the Fox River were watching the Valley Queen riverboat come by in the summers in the 1930s and 1940s. “The Japanese lanterns were lit, the ladies were all dressed up and the orchestra was playing ‘On Moonlight Bay’, Rosemary recalls.

SOURCE: Rosemary Bruehl

Catlin family members standing at the bottom of the stairs along the railroad tracks in front of the “railroad house.”

L – R: George Allanson, Maggie Allanson, Rose Catlin, George Catlin, and Mina Friederich.
Lake Sturgeon

The Town of Menasha area is home to a special, prehistoric fish that is said to have its ancestors date back 300 million years ago. Lake Winnebago is reported to contain the world’s largest population of lake sturgeon.

Lake sturgeon are bottom feeders that have no teeth and search the bottoms of the shallow lakes and rivers in search of food which consists of algae, insects, worms, and other similar organisms. The fish have rows of bony plates and have no scales. They have a life span of 50 years and are said to grow to great lengths and sizes.


Originally, these fish were considered a nuisance as they would continuously get caught in fishing nets. It wasn’t until after 1865, that their economic value was discovered. The sturgeon eggs can be made into the delicacy – caviar, and the fish could be eaten raw or smoked. A gelatin taken from the bladder could be used to make jams and jellies and used to clarify alcoholic beverages. The fish were also used for oil and glue and the skins were tanned for leather.

1963 opening day of sturgeon spearing. Dick Slattery.
Harvesting of the sturgeon has become a time-honored tradition each winter. Each year a week is set aside for this harvest, which typically consists of using spears to capture these prehistoric fish. The Town of Menasha, bordering the northern end of Lake Winnebago, has become a popular haven for these sturgeon spearers.

The *Neenah Gazette* reported in its January 25, 1879 edition of the “Butte des Morts whale” which was taken off of Pages Point on Little Lake Butte des Morts: “Two young men of Menasha, by the names of Page and Fisher, caught the largest sturgeon in Little Lake Butte des Morts, Sunday that was ever seen in these waters. It measured 7’4” in length and weighed 230 pounds.”

**SOURCE:** *Historic Tales of the Fox River Valley* by Giles Clark
Historical accounts show that one of the first settlers in the town, James Ladd, had constructed a lime-kiln on the west side of Little Lake Butte des Morts, which is said to have supplied the bricks for the construction of Lawrence University in Appleton. Arvin Sell, a long time resident of the town, also states that back in the 1800s on the back side of his property was a stone quarry where the stone and bricks used to construct Lawrence were taken from. Arvin describes this area as being in the area of present day USH 41, just north of the Green Bay Rd. overpass. There was a local man named Neff that had operated a “horse dreying” business, which is similar to today’s trucking companies. Apparently this Neff gentleman had hauled all of the stone and bricks to Lawrence from this quarry.

Arvin says that this Neff gentleman lived over in the area of the Bengal Farm, near present day road of the same name. Research has shown that a Samuel Neff was another early settler that lived in a government block house near present day Fritse Park and the person that Arvin describes could be a descendant of Samuel Neff.

SOURCE: Arvin Sell
Gene Patzner, owner of Home Furniture, laughingly recalls the good old times of McGlinn's Tavern and the St. Patrick's Day festivities that would occur each year. He proceeds to tell me of the legend of "Rosie O'Grady."

The legend of Rosie O'Grady takes us back to the 1960s and McGlinn's Tavern. McGlinn's Tavern was a popular Irish tavern, owned by Joseph McGlinn, located on Valley Rd. where the present day Cinderella Bar is located. The original McGlinn's building was a small wood-framed building that was demolished and buried in a deep hole.

Joe McGlinn, served as a Town of Menasha firefighter for 27 years, shown here on his retirement as assistant chief. *Appleton Post-Crescent.*

Joe McGlinn purchased the tavern in 1949, and it was quite popular with the Irish folk, especially on St. Patrick's Day. Joe McGlinn added a 24' X 58' addition, "just for St. Patrick's day," Joe recalled in a *News-Record* interview in 1983. Joe served on the Town of Menasha Fire Department for nearly 27 years, retiring as an assistant chief.

Gene Patzner states that if you dug a hole fifteen feet deep in the corner of his lot, you would find the original McGlinn's Tavern. "Years ago, that's just what they did with the old buildings," Gene states.

Being an Irish pub, McGlinn's was a popular hangout on St. Patrick's Day each year. Each year the owners of McGlinn's would bring in a coffin containing a mannequin, rightfully dubbed, "Rosie O'Grady." All day long, patrons would toast their drinks to celebrate the life of Rosie O'Grady.
At the end of the day, a procession would be arranged to bring Rosie to the cemetery down Valley Rd. Even the police got in on the celebration by leading the procession. Some where along the way, the mannequin would be swapped with a real female! Passersby would join in with the McGlinn's patrons as would spouses and family members.

Once everyone arrived at the cemetery, one person would shout out "Let's have one drink to Rosie!". The casket would then open and Rosie would rise, agreeing to the last toast! Unsuspecting people would scream in horror and many drinks were spilled at that moment!

The legend carried on until the early 1970s and still lives on in the memories of many! Since I have been told of this story, it has brought back many smiles and memories to others that I have told this to. Darlene Forster recalls being one of the surprised people at the opening of the casket at the cemetery!

SOURCE: Interviews with several residents
Life in a one-room schoolhouse

Eileen Tews (Nennig) attended the old one-room River Rd. School which was located on the corner of Highway 41 and E. Shady Ln. It was in an area where the present day American Ct. stands. Eileen recalls that the schoolhouse stood on a hill and the small creek, that is still there today, ran behind the school. The schoolhouse served grades one through eight.

The schoolhouse would consisted of one large room, with chairs set in a semi-circle in the middle of the room. As you would walk in the front doors, there would be a room off to the side with hooks to hang coats and a shelf to hold lunches. There was also a drinking water fountain and closet which held the classroom materials.

Eileen, known as Peggy, at the time attended River Rd. School from 1941 to 1948, attending 'til grade seven, when she transferred to St. Joseph’s school in Appleton. Eileen recalls there were four other children in her class: Richard Peapenburg, Tom Kaufman, Charles Derby II, and “Snuffy” Van Fossem.

There were two teachers that served during Eileen’s time at the school. The first teacher, Ms. Baumgarten, also known as Mrs. Juice, and was later replaced by Mrs. Pfeiffer. Eileen says she never understood why Ms. Baumgartner went by her maiden name, until later in life when she asked her father, who at that time served as a school board president, said that the board tried not to hire married teachers, as they were afraid they would become pregnant and need to be replaced. Apparently, the board realized the potential discrimination when they hired Mrs. Pfeiffer. The single teacher would be responsible for the entire school, which would average approximately 30 children. She would start to instruct one grade and then give an assignment and move on to the next grade level. When she reached the end, she would start all over again with a new subject. The teacher was always able to maintain control over the children and relied on parental involvement.

Some of Eileen’s memories include the annual Christmas program. Preparations were made early in December, and practice would be held for an hour in the afternoon; however, Eileen says that practices would always extend all afternoon! Parent would construct the stage of wood planks which would be set inside the school. Children would also celebrate Arbor Day by cleaning and raking the school yard all day. Spelling bees would also be held each year for all the students, and the PTA would hold monthly meetings, which always ended in a card party.

SOURCE: Eileen Tews
RACETRACK IDEA TURNS INTO A MALL

Paul Forster's father Andrew started the Fox Valley's first Harley-Davidson dealership at 725 W. Washington St. in Appleton in 1949. During this time, the Appleton Motorcycle Club, which Andrew was a member of, was looking for some land to build a ½ mile race track. The club purchased 42 acres of land off of Memorial Dr. between Calumet St. and Valley Rd. in the early 1950s. Before they could begin construction of the new race track, they were approached by Gerald Hoffman, who wanted to buy some of the land to construct an enclosed shopping center, which would later become Valley Fair Mall.

![Appleton Harley-Davidson. Paul Forster.](image)

The motorcycle club sold that land, and the land remaining was much too small for the race track. They decided to divide it up into single lots and sell it off to home construction. A road was built through that land and was duly named Chain Dr. as a reference to the motorcycle club, as motorcycles were chain-driven at the time. In 1956 Andrew Forster constructed a new building on the corner of the new Chain Dr. and Memorial Dr., to house his growing Harley-Davidson business. The business remained at that location until it was sold in 1963 and relocated once again. At that time a second story was added to this building and it has housed a variety of businesses since that time and still remains at that location today. As for the Harley-Davidson business, it changed ownership and locations several more times and is currently located in Grand Chute.

SOURCE: Paul and Darlene Forster

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PROHIBITION AND CEMETERIES

As reported in the Appleton Post-Crescent on July 23, 1981.

“The outlying area that was the Town of Menasha during the prohibition, especially those places with ravines, woods, and other hiding places played a big part in keeping the Fox Valley from being too dry.

The late Bill Zeininger Sr. wasn’t too shy in telling about those good-old bad-old-days and he recorded some of his tales on tapes that have been saved by his son Bill Jr. Old Bill told about the operation for making brew that was in existence out on Tayco St. until “somebody spilled the beans” and a few enterprising fellows had to race for the homegrown brewery, break up the equipment and roll the stores down into the ravine behind the St. Mary cemetery. However, the product was found and those in authority did what they had to do and destroyed the containers with axes. “Oh it was a terrible thing,” bemoaned old Bill.

Township cemeteries have played a role in booze trafficking too, according to another party who prefers his name not be revealed out of fear for retaliation by his relatives. According to him, a shipment of spirits was moved into the Fox Cities early one weekend and the couriers were worried that the appointed place of delivery was being scrutinized.

For lack of a better idea, he told the men he would pay for the stuff and that it was to be left in the cemetery around the grave marker of his family. The delivery was made as suggested and apparently the dealer notified his buyers where they could find their goods. “It must have been something to see that Sunday morning,” said the man, “when an unusual number of good citizens, all dressed in their Sunday best and probably on their way home from church, made a call at the parish cemetery to supposedly pay homage to their departed loved ones.”

SOURCE: Appleton Post-Crescent
Sackett’s Grocery

Harvey and Mildred Sackett had lived in the Town of Menasha on Lakeshore Dr. after serving together in the Army during WWII. Harvey had owned the Empire Bar on College Ave. in Appleton and was looking to open another business. He decided on opening up a small “country” grocery store on Racine Rd. At the time the only closest grocery stores were in Appleton and Menasha. It was thought that this would be an ideal location for the growing neighborhood.


Shortly after the store was built, Harvey built a home next door for his family. According to their daughter, Dawn, her mother couldn’t swim and was afraid the kids were going to drown by living on the lake. She couldn’t understand why she would feel safer living on the much busier Racine Rd.

The Sackett’s operated the grocery store for several years until it became too cost prohibitive. During that time; patrons would be allowed to purchase on credit; however, many would never pay up on their debt. Harvey, at times, would take items in trade, as evidenced by a large box of “trinkets” his children found in the back of the store. Harvey eventually auctioned off both properties and went to work in the construction trade as a mason, eventually serving as President of the Neenah Masonic Temple.

SOURCE: Dawn Sackett
Streetcar Adventures

Many town residents that I have spoken to have fond memories of the streetcar. Rosemary Bruehl recalls riding the streetcar quite often from her home in Appleton to meet her relatives at Waverly Beach for summer picnics. She vividly remembers one particular conductor, Mr. Hughes, as being a nice man and seemed to be always working the streetcars when Rosemary rode.

Betty Goss remembers riding the streetcars every Sunday to visit her mother’s family in Kaukauna. On one occasion when Betty was a young child, she was wearing a new petticoat and had a new slip on with crocheted lace. Betty lifted her dress, showing her slip singing, “lace for show, lace for show,” as she paraded up and down the aisle, which greatly upset her mother at the time!

Alice Weber recalls riding the streetcar as a child. Alice grew up on the Gear Farm on Plank Rd. and would ride the streetcar with her sisters each day to school and back. One day, Alice, a kindergartner at the time, was waiting for the streetcar after school; however her sister Sybil was late. The streetcar arrived and Alice boarded without her sister.

The Gear Farm was located out on Plank Rd., and Alice knew that she had to get off the streetcar at “Finnegan’s corner.” Finnegan’s Tavern was located on this intersection. When Alice boarded the streetcar, the conductor had difficulty understanding her. Alice ended up missing her stop and rode the streetcar “all over town”.

While Alice’s sister and mother grew worried, Alice states that she had a wonderful time riding the streetcar. When the streetcar stopped for the conductor change, the off-going conductor was explaining to his counterpart that he didn’t know where the young girl belonged and that she had been riding all afternoon. The on coming conductor knew Alice’s father and replied, “That’s Charlie Gear’s daughter,” and was able to drop young Alice off at Finnegan’s corner.

Source: Interviews with local residents
Valley Fair was a hot spot for kids

This story courtesy of Appleton resident Jason Fowler.

Let me start by saying that for anyone born and raised in the Fox Valley and older than age 35, Valley Fair Mall was one of the first places to go and hang out. Valley Fair was a big part of the lives of all the kids who lived by the mall and, for that matter, the Fox Valley. As a 40 year old who grew up less than a half-mile away from the mall, I have many great memories of it and the surrounding area.

As a young child, my mother, sister and I would walk to the mall to have breakfast at the Golden Griddle and to shop for part of the day. On special days we would get some ice cream at Grant’s Department store and get groceries at the Food Queen. One day, as a very young kid, I remember seeing the world-famous Harlem Globetrotters.

On the hot summer days, to find something to do, all we needed to do was walk or ride our bikes to the mall. I can still remember the sweet smell of the burlap bag that you sat on to go fast down the big red slide with the hills that were there before the Kohl’s building but right by the old movie theater and the old Grant’s Department store. When you had enough of the slide, you could walk to the back of the building and take a few hot laps on the go-kart track. After that, you stopped by the fireworks stand and some items for the big Fourth of July bash. Then there would be the big beer can shows they would have in the old part of the mall before that was torn down to make way for Kohl’s.
Also, behind the mall was a large woods. We would ride our dirt bikes through the winding trails, over the jumps and through the big mud puddles after a big rain, and come back full of mud for our mothers. We also used to shoot our pellet guns back in the woods (I'm sure we weren't supposed to be doing it, but it went on.) Then the go-kart track was gone, but we made ourselves a new track form the old one for our BMX bikes that we were into then. But we lost that as well when we called The Post-Crescent to come and take pictures of our new track to show off the big jumps we had made. The pictures of our friend crashing his bike on the second page of The Post-Crescent didn't help us at all. Shortly after that, the track was all cleaned up. No more racing there, but we did make the paper and as a 10- or 12- year old, that was big time!

So the slide and the go-kart track were gone, and the woods were being taken from us to make way for the retirement home that's now there. Then Kohl's came in, and the mall got carpet floors. Yikes, no more riding our bikes inside the mall! But the best part of the new changes at the mall were coming.

Enter 1979, and a new product called the video game. Pocket Change opened, as well as the new movie theater and Godfathers Pizza. There was a Nike shoe store, along with a custom T-Shirt place. What more could a kid of 14 want? We spent many days mastering the likes of Pac-Man and the Galaga bees swarming at us. On snow days when we had no school, we could always walk to the mall. Once there, we had to hope that the manager of Pocket Change would make it in so we would have something to do for the day.

It was a place to meet new people and, of course, look to meet girls. Many of us took our first dates to that movie theater. We rented our first tux for prom at the old Maurices. I had friends who worked at Mike's Town and Country and several other stores there. My hair was cut there for many years. I bought my first gift for a girl there when I was back in fifth grade. The mall, at the time, was a one-stop place. We could get our Godfathers Pizza, watch a movie with a date, and still be able to play some video games. Can a 15-year old ask for more than that? Well, back then, no. And the best of all was we could walk or ride our bikes to the mall. I sure haven't noticed many bikes at Fox River Mall.

Valley Fair signs, 2006. Author.
I had been away from the area for 15 years and, when I came back this past year, one of the first places I went was to the mall to reminisce about old times. It opens your head to walk the same places you did as a child and think about then and now, where you’ve been and gone. The memories will always be there, no matter what’s built in its place. A new building can’t take away the past memories of the kids who lived close to Valley Fair Mall. The sounds of the arcade and the life of the mall will fall silent. But I can always go back and play the golden tapes from my mind to remember the good old days of the mall, when it was full of adults and children playing and having fun shopping. It was the place to be.

SOURCE: Jason Fowler
UNSOLVED MYSTERIES

Frank Frye

December 21, 1969 - Frank Frye, a retired Appleton police detective sergeant, is working his retirement job as the night clerk at the former Embassy Motor Lodge, now the present Colonial Inn, at the corner of CTH BB and USH 41. That morning, at approximately 6 a.m., Frye’s body is found in a snow bank off of CTH MM just outside of Zittau in rural Winnebago County. About a half hour before his body is discovered, the manager of the Embassy Motor Lodge reports Frye missing, along with about $260. The manager last reports checking on Frye around 3 a.m.

The Town of Menasha didn’t have a police force at the time; therefore, the Winnebago County Sheriff’s Department was assigned the case. There have been several theories into the murder including robbery, revenge by some criminal from Frye’s 22 years on the Appleton force, or some sort of unknown grudge. The sheriff’s department had several suspects and many leads; however, the case has remained unsolved. The case is still being looked at by the Winnebago County Sheriff’s Department and recently the Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation has assigned an investigator to assist.

Anyone with information on this case is urged to contact the Winnebago County Sheriff’s Department.

SOURCES: Winnebago County Sheriff’s Department
Appleton Post-Crescent

Bonnie Repinski

August 15, 1975 – Bonnie Repinski, a Sheboygan native, is currently living in the Town of Menasha near her sister as she goes through a divorce from her husband David Repinski. As with many divorces, this is an emotional times for the entire family, and Bonnie moves to the town to try to alleviate some of the stresses with the pending divorce. David Repinski calls Bonnie a few days earlier and plans to take her out for her birthday and to talk about the pending divorce. The couple goes out to several taverns in the Oshkosh and Neenah area before heading back to Bonnie’s new home. According to David, while they were enroute, an argument ensued and David says that Bonnie got out of the car near the intersection of USH 41 and STH 150 to walk home. Bonnie has never been seen or heard from since that time.
The case is being handled by the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department presumably because it occurred on USH 41, which falls under the jurisdiction of the sheriff, or due to the fact that the Town of Menasha Police Department was in its infancy at the time and did not have an investigative unit at the time. The sheriff's department investigation has failed to produce any significant developments, and Bonnie is still listed as a missing person and occasionally the sheriff's department receives information which they follow up on.

Anyone with information on this case is urged to contact the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department.

SOURCE: Winnebago Sheriff's Department

Laurie Depies

August 19, 1992 – Twenty-year old Laurie Depies leaves work from the Fox River Mall enroute to her boyfriend's apartment on W. Wilson Ave. in the Town of Menasha. She drives her 1984 gray Volkswagen the six miles and presumably arrives in the apartment parking lot at approximately 10:20 p.m. Her boyfriend did not actually see her arrive, just heard the noisy muffler from her vehicle. When Laurie did not come up the stairs to the apartment after some time, he went down to check on her, finding her car parked in a parking stall with a Styrofoam cup on top. Laurie has not been seen or heard from since.

Photo on left shows Laurie as she looked in 1992. Photo on right is a computer enhanced photo showing what she might look like in 2005. Town of Menasha Police Dept.
The Town of Menasha Police Department was contacted and has been investigating the case ever since. At the time, former Chief William Wiess tells the media, "Really, there are basically three scenarios that could have occurred: one, she was forcibly abducted by a stranger; two, she left on her own volition with somebody she knew or thought she knew; and three, she just decided to leave."

The case continues to be actively pursued and is reviewed periodically each year by the same original lead investigator with assistance from the Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation. Anyone with information is encouraged to contact the Town of Menasha Police Department.

SOURCE: Town of Menasha Police Department
The case involved 18-year-old Laurie Degies, who disappeared from a mall in Menasha, Wisconsin. Authorities believe she may have been taken by someone she met there. The search continues, and Laurie is still listed as a missing person. The Menasha Police Department receives information which they follow up on.

Anyone with information about Laurie's whereabouts is encouraged to contact the Menasha Police Department. Laurie was last seen at the Fox River Mall.

SOURCE: Menasha Police Department

Lauree Degies

August 19, 1992 – Twenty-year-old Laurie Degies leaves work from the Fox River Mall enroute to her boyfriend’s apartment on W. Wilson Ave. in the Town of Menasha. She drives her 1984 gray Volkswagen the six miles to presumably arrive at approximately 10:20 p.m. Her boyfriend did not actually see her arrive, just heard the noisy motor from her vehicle. When Lauree did not come up the stairs to the apartment after some time, he went down to check on her, finding her car parked in a parking stall with a Styrofoam cup on top. Lauree has not been seen or heard from since.

Photo on left shows Laurie as she looked in 1992. Photo on right is a computer-enhanced photo showing what she might look like in 2005. Town of Menasha Police Dept.

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