THEREBY HANGS A TALE

In every historical accounting of material which deals with people, as in this history of Cambria, there are anecdotes, folklore, and interesting trivia that fit under no exact heading. Yet, these bits and pieces perhaps relate a more personal, human viewpoint which often gets glossed over and nearly trampled in the rush of facts and dates.

One of the earliest pieces of folklore is appropriately connected with the earliest inhabitants, the Winnebagoes. There once lived in the Indian village along Duck Creek, a lovely princess, Glory of the Morning. There also was a brave war chief, Yellow Thunder, whose grandson was Chief Yellow Thunder at Wisconsin Dells.

A typical country road of the 1800’s and early 1900’s as it was found winding its way south from the top of the hill near Hwg. 146 in 1905. The tracks in the foreground are of buggy wheels since no car had yet traveled here. The road was simple dirt because gravel wasn’t common until 1920.

Another interesting early tale was connected with one of the craftsmen at Langdon’s saw mill. The following is an excerpted version of “The Tale of Jonas Warncke” as printed in the Cambria News of 1901.

Of Jonas Warncke (Thereby Hangs A Tale). By trade he was a cabinet maker and an excellent workman.

Up to the time of the completion of the mill, Warncke had been one of the steadiest and most thoroughly industrious men there. An unfortunate marriage set him to drinking, he became dissipated, and while stopping at a tavern near Markesan, as was afterward shown, was stupidly drunk. He was inveigled into
assisting in the robbery of a German family, living near here, reputed to have a large amount of gold coin in the home. Warncke went with the tavernkeeper, his brother and another man and stayed in the wagon while the three went into the house to commit the robbery which created the wildest excitement at the time.

The parties went upstairs, and clutching the old people in their bed, demanded their money. The old German woman passed the robbers a stocking filled with old-fashioned buttons and they, at once, started to leave. One of the sons had heard the men enter and hid himself till they had got upstairs when he drew on his pantaloons and grabbing a loaded double-barreled shot gun, went outside and squatted in the bushes by the side of the road. As the robbers were leaving, he fired at them, first one and then the other barrel. Cries and groans were heard. The wounded man was dragged off by his companions. The bushes were sprinkled with blood and a trail of it was found leading to the road. It was claimed afterward that the wounded man had died immediately and was dis-embowled by his companions and weights tied to his body which was sunk in Lake Marie nearby.

Warncke, with returning sobriety told all and gave himself up. The other two were arrested, tried and convicted principally upon the admission of Warncke. All were sent to Waupun, Warncke for a short term. Before it had expired Governor Lewis pardoned him. Judge, Jury, District Attorney, Sheriff and a large number of citizens urged the pardon. Never was more contrition and sorrow shown than by Warncke.

And now comes one of the strangest facts. The writer hereof, who knew Warncke well and was under some obligation to him, helped make the dam at Cambria and worked for the owners of the mill, aided in procuring the pardon. Before it was granted some friends subscribed thirty dollars to purchase an outfit of suitable clothes for Warncke, and Mr. A. D. Seaman of Milwaukee not only gave a little money but at once promised, when application was made to him, to give Warncke a place at good wages in his furniture manufacturing. The money was taken to Waupun, left with a gentleman who was to give to Warncke as soon as possible. A pass for him to Milwaukee was given by the railroad, the moment the facts were laid before them. Warncke was seen, and he agreed to come in.

Learning of his release, the writer went to Waupun, saw Warncke on the street, who avoided him, found the money had not been called for, sent a note to Warncke at his boarding house, got no reply. The money was paid back to his subscribers. The next anything was heard of Warncke, he was suspected of aiding in the murder of a man named Williams who had been innocently convicted in Milwaukee. He was committed to Waupun and had $300.00 which was paid him at the expiration of his term. He was murdered and robbed near Lake Emily, his body dressed in a suit of clothes stolen from a home near at hand, was dragged into a thicket near Schaumburg's by Lake Emily, where it was found after decomposition had set in.

Warncke was never caught. He was traced by the sheriff of Dodge County to near the southern lines. It was after the rebellion broke out. It was supposed he had joined the Confederates. He has never been heard from since.
The home of Jasper Dexter - built in 1901

One of the early elegant and still standing Cambria homes. This was originally R. E. O. Jones’ home built in 1867 from handmade Watertown brick. It was purchased in 1952 by Ray Leary.
In the "Cambria Centennial, 1844-1944", there was compiled a set of interesting DO YOU REMEMBER? trivia. The following are a few excerpts from those pages.

"When it was necessary to keep the city water system from freezing by using lanterns?"

"When we paid 11 cents for a dozen eggs?"

"When the speed limit was 8 miles an hour?"

"How we like to follow the horse-drawn sprinkling wagon?"

"If you ever went to see the 'Four o'clock' come in on Sunday afternoon?"

"Hop picking time at the Houston's?"

"When the street lights were unlit for a period of months because the village did not want to spend the treasury surplus for oil and up-keep?"

"That Cambria once had two telephone exchanges?"

"When skating to music in the curling rink was as popular as pavement dances?"

"The watermelons which used to come to town by the wagon load and were sold for five cents a piece?"

"When you were punished for just peeking through the windows at the dances in the Chatwood Hotel?"

"When the old wooden sidewalks caused many a fall on dark nights?"
The coming of the automobile - one of the first cars shown off by Mrs. J. O. Parry and Mrs. O. I. Jones in 1904. The car was partially built by Rev. J. O. Parry.

There is perhaps one area that is often ignored, yet which certainly was a historical fact and reality. In the 19th century when infant mortality was high, when epidemics weren’t unusual, and where life expectancy was shorter, funeral customs were important facts of life.

For the early settlers, burial rites were simple, the bodies were prepared in the home. Neighbors came to stay day and night to put cold wet cloths on the faces of the deceased until the time of burial.

It was also a neighborly custom to take the rough, unpainted outer boxes to the cemetery the day before burial. Originally, this process was conducted with a lumber wagon in summer and sleighs in the winter. However, in the 1890’s glass-encased carriages drawn by black horses came into use - the first hearses. The 1920’s saw the horse-drawn carriages become obsolete with the advent of the automobile.

A most interesting fact is brought to light when one researches the history of the Welsh village name of ‘Cambria’. It seems that name is 2000 years old. It was used by the Romans to designate land the Welsh occupied which at that early date included Wales and all of England. The Welsh people always called their country and people ‘Cymru’. But, ‘Der Walsh’ was a term applied to them by the Germanic invading tribes, meaning, “those strange ones”. Camrae, as the Romans spelled it, may have been the Roman attempt to say ‘Cymru’.

Another example of Welsh terms being used in Cambria is the name given to the 1940 year book at the High School. It was called the “Melin” which means ‘mill’ after the origins of the community.
How exactly did the early settlers arrive in Cambria? There were no railroads, no paved roads and certainly no highway signs.

However, see article and follow from the beginning through its conclusion. The second road in this state was built by soldiers at Fort Winnebago from Portage around the north shore of Fox Lake to Fond du Lac. Soon a branch led south from Fox Lake on County A through Oak Grove, Watertown and Waukesha to Milwaukee. All settlers coming to the Cambria area had only this road to follow. All commercial goods and passengers were carried over this road between Portage and Milwaukee until the railroad came in 1856. Taverns were built about 5 miles apart along this road. One of them, The Blue Tavern was built by John and Samuel McConochie, on the north side of the road now Hwy 33, about one half mile east of the Rosedale Church. A little settlement was started about 2 miles north of Cambria and named Centerville for the surveyor, A. J. Center. This was at the junction of present 33 and the Inglehart Road. There was a store, a blacksmith shop and a tavern there. In 1851 the stagecoach made the trip over this route three times a week, also bringing the mail. With the coming of the railroad all business ended there. Present Hwy 33 is the same route, especially the improvement between 146 and 73, that the Fort Winnebago soldiers built from Portage to Fox Lake.
FIRES AND DISASTERS

Fire Of 1874----North side of Water St.

On a Sunday afternoon in December, 1874 a fire destroyed nine buildings on the north side of what is now Edgewater St. in the central block of business buildings, from the west end to Madison St. Completely destroyed were the buildings occupied by:

B. W. Smith Store, a branch of his Fox Lake Store, run by David Williams, Tany Bwlch
large wooden building, warehouse and dwelling
Adam Schlesman shoe shop
D. D. Jones, dry goods
D. Roberts, tailor and dwelling
E. R. Williams, harness shop
George Buck, barber shop
Thomas Lewis, harness shop

The loss was estimated between $18,000.00 and $20,000.00 with little insurance coverage. Some goods were saved. All windows on the south side of the street were broken by the heat. It all was a hard blow to Cambria. Better buildings replaced the old ones, some of which are in use today - 1976.

Fire Of 1879----South side of Water St.

Four buildings, including the Peterman Hotel burned on April 20, 1879, on the south side of what is now Edgewater St. The loss was estimated to be $35,000.00. The Peterman Hotel was a large stone building.

Cambria Canning Factory----November 2, 1924

The structure, remodeled in 1920, was completely destroyed by fire on Sunday afternoon, Nov. 2, 1924. The season’s destruction of peas amounted to 175,000 cases; it was rebuilt in time for the next season’s pack in 1925.

Tornado Of 1951

On Sept. 26, 1951 a tornado swept through N.E. Columbia County leaving destruction in a path about 15 miles long and one fourth mile wide from Wyocena through the Randolph area. Two steel towers were demolished carrying high tension lines, the principal lines of the Wis. Power and Light Co. It put a 126 mile area and 30 farms out of service. Twelve farms suffered severe damage and one woman killed, several hospitalized. Livestock and chickens were killed, cars and machinery destroyed, and the area covered with debris. Among the farms suffering severe damage were those of John Lloyd, William Krueger, Robert Kellogg, Sidney Cupery and Harold Cupery.
"THE ICEMAN COMETH" and in the 1890's that was surely the case. Mr. Bergum was an ice man. He lived in a part of the building that most recently bore his name.

That building was demolished in 1970, but not before it played a part in the history of the village and of an era. When the ice business was in its prime, an ice house was built to the north of the building next to the Mill Pond, with a long chute leading from the building down to the pond. In ice cutting time men cut the ice with long saws into 50 pound chunks; a few at a time were loaded onto the slide and horses pulled them into the building where the ice was packed in saw dust or hay and then stored for summer use.

You could go there and buy your own 25 or 50 pound chunk if you lived in the country, carry it home in blankets or a wash tub and have icecream for the Fourth of July; or maybe you needed a large section to keep a supply of fresh meat for the threshers or silo fillers.

If you lived in the village the ice man made his rounds and with a big tongs carried a 25 or 50 pound slab on his back and dropped it into your ice box. Meat markets had large walk-in ice rooms; the meat cutter got a side of meat that hung in there, put it on the chopping block and sawed or chopped off a piece to your order.

On a road north of the old Sanderson School looking south in 1908, Sarah Jones, Lillian Jones and Gladys Jones posed for a picture.

Returning to the subject of schools, education for pioneer children was of secondary importance to that of everyday survival. The early schools ran for six months starting in November because the older children were needed at home to help harvest the fall crops and plow until the ground froze. A man teacher was hired for the winter months to handle the big boys who were then in school. School closed for March because roads would become too muddy for pupils to travel...the spring term started the first of April with a lady teacher who could handle the younger children who were then available for instruction. This term lasted through April and May. In later years this was extended through June, and the entire school year then totaled seven months.
A section of land which certainly has historical as well as religious and personal worth is the Cambria Cemetery.

Records show that the first burial ground in the village was the south-west corner of the community, near the east corner of Mary and Commerce Streets. Still, when the railroad came through in 1856 the site was needed for the right-of-way, the depot and the expansion of the village. Consequently, a cemetery area was obtained in Courtland to the south of the village, and graves were moved there.

Interesting bits of history are connected with the old plot. The first grave was that of a young man, 25 years of age, buried July, 1847, son of a well digger and pump maker. The stories continue with the fact that not all graves and bodies were recovered and moved, as subsequent excavations for buildings can testify.

At its present location, the first person buried in this cemetery was David Owen (Gearwen) in 1863, a great-great-grandfather of the late Morris and Merwyn Rowlands. The oldest persons buried there were born in 1803 and 1809, ancestors of the Clayton Morgan family.

Here are the last resting places of many of our war dead, among seventeen from the Civil War and two from the Spanish-American conflict. The south-east corner of the oldest part of the grounds was formerly known as Potter’s Field. It contains five nameless graves, three or four have name markers. This area was where unknown strangers or those who had no money for a lot were buried.

The lannon stone chapel here was dedicated on May 28, 1938. This chapel was made possible by many substantial money gifts and money-making projects of all kinds by the entire community.

Through the years three additions have been made to the cemetery area and another entrance driveway leading to the chapel and still another to the north of the last addition of land. In 1972 a well was dug and pipeline laid for watering, the cost raised by popular subscription. Most recently the roads were resurfaced with crushed lime. The interest of the Perpetual Care Fund, together with contributions from the Town of Courtland and the Village of Cambria maintain the upkeep and expenses of the Cemetery.

Early sextons were William and David Morgan, who kept the grass trimmed with scythes. Mr. Jeff Williams, father of Hugh Williams was the first to use a hand mower. He served as caretaker for thirty-four years.

Over the years several Cambria residents have distinguished themselves in the arenas of war. One of the earliest was Dr. John Ll. Williams who was a surgeon in the Medical Corps at Vicksburg Prison from 1864-1866. While there he saw the first use of chloroform.

World War I chaplain Rev. John F. Jones (Coety) served also as YMCA War Secretary from 1918-1919. In that same war William R. Davies was with the Army Medical Corps, YMCA at Camp Custer from 1917-1919.

In 1908 foot races were part of the holiday celebration which was held in the street since no other large facilities existed at that time.

Further festivities of the 4th.


The Fred Pickruhn's 'horseless carriage'
Concerning the creation of the village of Cambria from legal aspects, the Columbia County History of 1880 gives a detailed account of its inception:

"Since the original plat was recorded, several additions have been made to the village....Cambria was under town government until 1866, the Legislature of that year passing an act of incorporation, the government was to consist of a President and five Trustees, a Clerk, Treasurer, Police Chief and Constable, who should be an ex-officio and the Police Justice were to be elected annually, on the second Monday in April, the other officers to be appointed by the President and Trustees....The Police Justice was given all the rights and privileges of a Justice of the Peace, and was entitled to the same fees as received by them. Power was given to the President and Trustees to grant licenses for the sale of intoxicating liquors, for organizing fire companies, restraining drunkards, establishing pounds, and the licensing and controlling of other matters that might be necessary for good government."

The beginning of the village water system during the term of Mr. Hopkins.

There have been several mayors who have served long and commendable terms in office. The first mayor - Mr. E. O. Jones - was one such individual.

Mr. Al Hopkins  Irvin Abendroth  Jay Williams
A Great Event In 1852
(California Gold Rush)

Eight men from the community of Blaen-y-cae, 5 or 6 miles Northeast of Cambria in 1852 planned a trip to the California gold fields. They were all Welsh men. They started the last of March in two wagons and eight pairs of oxen. They reached Council Bluffs on the Missouri River by May 5th. John Jones became ill and died here. They had to wait two weeks for pastures to grow food for the animals. May 22nd they crossed the river.

The eight men were namely; John Jones, J. Roberts, Bont Newydd, D. Roberts, T. R. Roberts, T. D. Foulks, E. Parry, Robert Williams, William Jones. On June 27th they reached Fort Laramie, 638 miles from Council Bluffs. Flour there was 20 dollars a barrel. Ten dollars was paid for shoeing on oxen. They followed the Platte River for 170 miles. They journeyed through the Great Desert for 100 miles without pasture for the animals, and about 60 miles without water. The salt in places was six inches deep.

August 1st -- Robert Williams became ill of cholera and died nine days later. He was buried near Thousand Springs. On the 20th two more men became ill and stayed at the Mormon Tavern. The four men left reached the California gold mines Sept. 24th. One of the men left behind dies. He had a coffin and a funeral. His name was John J. Roberts. Bont Newydd, the second man who had stayed at the Mormon Tavern reached California in November but died shortly. He was David Roberts, the first settler in Blaen-y-cae. He was the man who had helped the Welsh settlers find farms because he could speak English. This David Roberts was Catherine Foulk's son.

First White Woman In Cambria

Mrs. Jabez Lloyd was the first woman in Cambria. She met Indians so often that she could speak their language. Her husband Jabez Lloyd was one of the nine men who came to Welsh Prairie, but being a carpenter he settled near the village, at the northwest of present day Cambria. After building his house he built a leanto on it for a family to live in while he built their home.

The New Baby Story

A family living near the railroad track had a new baby. An older brother was sent the next morning to ask a neighbor to come and help take care of the baby. The lady asked him when the baby came. Said the boy "Last night when the seven o'clock train went thru".

Keeping Time On The Prairie

David Roberts had a clock which he bought in the east on his way here. He finished paying for it after reaching Wisconsin. It was Mrs. Roberts task to check the clock with a sun dial when they had sunshine in the yard. All the settlers then checked with Roberts.
Jerusalem

In the 1900's young men came from Wales to attend Ripon College. They preached at the country churches to help pay their way through college. One young man was to preach at Jerusalem Church south of Cambria one Sunday and proceeded to the depot at Ripon asking for a ticket to Jerusalem. The agent said he could not do that in Ripon. Well said the young man I must have a ticket for I am due to preach there tomorrow morning. Then someone who knew the area said "It is a ticket to Cambria he wants, Jerusalem is the name of a church there."