

# **SELHS News**

**Newsletter of the Sterling Eureka and Laketown History Society**

Volume 7, No.2

Memory Room – Cushing Community Center

April, 2013

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## **Sterling Picnic Celebrates 75 Yrs!**

Sunday, June 30, 2013 will be the 75<sup>th</sup> annual Sterling Picnic. Gathering starts at 11, with a potluck lunch at noon, a program at 1 and visiting with friends and neighbors all day! The picnic is at the Cushing Community Center, lower floor (the old Cushing School).

Seventy-five years ago a group of pioneers who settled along the St Croix River 50 years earlier met to remember the old days. They met at the junction of Cowan Creek and Trade River, the center of the original community. Just up the hill west was the Swedish Lutheran Mission church and cemetery. A half mile to the east was the original site of the Sterling Township Hall.

The meeting site, just north of the bridge on Evergreen Av, was originally part of the farm of Dr. Henry H Bush, a homesteader, and the local doctor for the community, and for a brief period, the site of the local post office.

In 1939, all that was left of the community was the old cemetery and the traditional

picnic area on Trade River. The area on both sides of Trade River, part of the Bush farm, had been purchased as flood plain by the logging companies in the late 1880s when the huge St Croix Nevers Logging dam was built a few miles down from the mouth of Trade River.

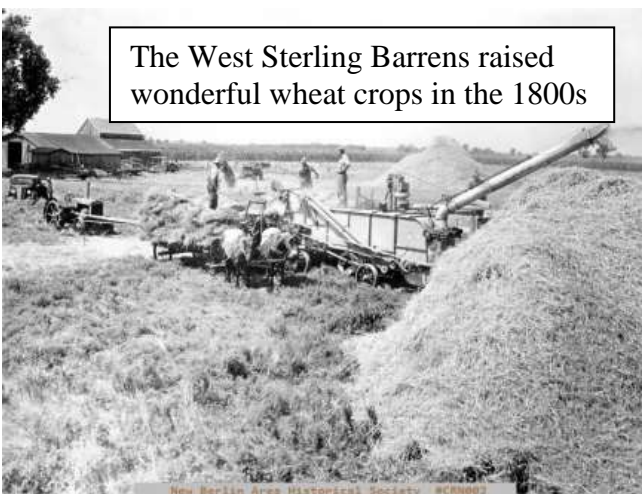
At the time of the first picnic, the local Boy Scouts had improved the area as a campsite. A dozen large white pines shaded the area, the swift, cold, red stained Trade flowed through the camp. In 1939, it was a beautiful site for a picnic, just as it was in the 1870s when the first settlers homesteaded on the Sterling Barrens. Up the hill to the east was the water source—a pipe driven into a hillside spring running cold water year round.

The first picnic started a tradition of keeping records of who attended and recognizing the oldest and longest married settlers.

The St Croix River for centuries had been a highway for the Native Americans who lived in the area. The Dakota lived here first, and gradually were pushed out as the Ojibwa moved in, pushed westward in the 1700s by white folks moving from the original colonies ever westward in the search for new timber, furs and farms.

In the winter of 1831-2, Joseph Renshaw Brown had a trading post at the mouth of Wolf Creek. In 1837, a treaty was made with the Ojibwa, opening the area to logging and settlement. The area was surveyed in the 1840s, and by that time, the River Road

The West Sterling Barrens raised wonderful wheat crops in the 1800s



coming north of St Croix Falls, was already listed as a “waggon trail to the pineries.”

In the early 1860s, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act. A farmer could choose 160 acres of public land (almost all of Sterling), move in, build a house and raise crops on part of it for 5 years and get it free with proof of improvements.



Henry Bush, MD lived at the junction of Trade River and Cowan Creek in West Sterling at the time the church, townhall, and cemetery began. Many local folks called it “the Bush Cemetery” after the local doctor who was well respected, but did have some patients end up in the cemetery!

Although there were some settlers here before the Homestead act (in fact, Sterling was organized as Moscow Township in 1855), the population was low until the Civil War was over (1865) and the Homestead law was underway.

The first settlers were loggers, and those who supported loggers. By 1870, an influx of homesteaders began. Many came from Scandinavia; many were farmers from Iowa, Ohio, and areas out east with some folks coming from Canada.

West Sterling was an open prairie in the 1850s. The Native Americans called it Moscodeng “flower covered prairie.” Sterling was first named “Moscow” the first postoffice, Moscotink—all reflecting the prairie motif.

The prairie was maintained by fires set by lightning, the Natives, and later the settlers.

Farmers plowed open land. They yoked many oxen to heavy hand breaking plows and turned the heavy sod over and planted wheat.

The Sterling barrens were essentially piles of sand, drifted into dunes some 1000s of years earlier when the last glacier melted, forming a huge lake. Sand washed in leaving a 20 foot layer over the 100 foot old clay lake bottom. When the lake drained rapidly, the sand blew into dunes that were eventually stabilized by bluestem grasses and other prairie plants.

The rich topsoil found by pioneers was thin and the blow sand just a few inches below it. Farmers plowed the sod, had excellent wheat fields during the 70s and 80s, but by the 1890s, the top soil was worn out. Then in the early 1890s with severe drought the sand again began to blow across the now large open fields. Drought, worn out soil and wind drove the farmers away too.

By 1900, most of the homesteaders had moved on. The church closed. The town hall was moved east to the River Road following Wolf Creek, now the center of population. The farmers moved out, many east of Wolf Creek, and began the laborious effort clearing the hardwoods. Others moved on West.

The early settlers no longer kept in touch. In 1939, Amanda Nordstrom an early settler family, and others who had lived in West Sterling planned the first picnic—a chance for the original settlers to once again see each other and remember the hey days in the barrens.

And so 75 years later, we continue the tradition with another picnic. We do it to recognize the pioneers who first came to this area, and to celebrate those from our neighbors who have survived a long life and can tell us the stories of what our neighborhood was like in the good old days!

*Wanted: Volunteers to help with the 76<sup>th</sup> Sterling Picnic. Easy job, great deal of satisfaction and fame, and a fun group! For 75 years volunteers have kept the picnic going!*



West Sterling Pioneer Cemetery in 1913. Pictured are Emona Hansen, Lottie Erickson and Ole Torkleson. It was built in 1879 and had services in it for many decades. The cemetery was abandoned as people moved away.



Settlers Picnics were at the Junction of Cowan Creek and Trade River in West Sterling from 1939 for many years. That site became private and the picnic moved to the Old Sterling Townhall, and then in 2000 to the Cushing Community Center.

Edwin and Astrid Erickson were old settlers and active in making the picnic a success over the years.



The Sterling Old Settlers picnic quickly became a springboard for election to local politics. The list of early chairmen and committee members overlapped with the list of Town Board members. If you were elected chairman of the picnic, you were likely to become Town Chairman. In the 40s -60s attendance at the outdoor picnic along Trade River reached as high as 350 people. Early picnics often included a short speech by the local state representative and county officials. A short sermon from a local minister helped those who skipped church for the picnic feel that they hadn't broken the Sabbath. The outdoor picnic area took a lot of work to clean each year after it became a horse camp



1939

Standard  
Press

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Armstrong attended a gathering, which was held in the pine grove on the west side of Trade River, near the little cemetery in Sterling, known as the Bush Church Cemetery, last Sunday, June 25th.

Old friends who used to live in that neighborhood and those who had relatives buried there came to visit and live again some of the bygone day's stories. Ernest was born there, and so were many of the others present.

The little church has been torn down, but its old bell and pulpit are stored in the big brick church at Trade Lake (Basement) as relics.

This little church known to many as Bush's church was organized in 1879 and the church built in 1881. It was served by the Trade Lake Lutheran pastors.

The little cemetery at the top of the hill west of the river, which marks the location, is the burial place of many of Sterling's first settlers in that western section.

Those who attended besides the Armstrong people mentioned were: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Carlson (Mr. Carlson is sheriff of Douglas county.) Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Carlson, Mr. and Mrs. Morris Hoover and Wayne, Mr. and Mrs. Jos. C. Ryan, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Jos. C. Ryan, Jr., with Patsy and Joan, from Superior; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lindgren, Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Rowland, Ella and Ardys Nordstrom, from Minneapolis; Mr. and Mrs. Louis Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. Newell Fisk, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. Nels Nelson and family, from North Branch, Minnesota; Mr. and Mrs. Fred Fisk, Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Erickson from Sunrise, Minn.; Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Munson, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hedlund, from Lindstrom; Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Mattson and Mildred, from Chisago City; Mr. and Mrs. John J. Johnson, from Rush City; Mr. and Mrs. Mason Fisk, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Nelson, Mrs. Anna Amundson, from St. Croix Falls; Mr. and Mrs. John Lindgren and family, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Nordstrom, Eric Nordstrom, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Noyes and Raymond, from Cushing; Mr. and Mrs. Nels Nelson and family, from Eureka Center; Mr. and Mrs. Nels Munson, from Grantsburg; and Miss Selma Munson of New Prague, Minn.; Mrs. Gust Sturm from Frederic.

A program which consisted of talks was given by, Fred Lindgren, Fred Fisk, Frank Carlson, Louis Nelson, and Mrs. Armstrong.

It was also the 70th birthday anniversary of Mr. John Lindgren and mention was made in that honor.

Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Nordstrom had done much to get these people together. Mr. Nordstrom had even

Bush's  
Church

hauled benches and tables from Cushing Lutheran Church and made ready for the event.

Mrs. Nels Munson was in charge of the ice cream serving, and Eric Nordstrom made the coffee.

The friends enjoyed both dinner and supper out there.

Many trips were made up the hill to the little cemetery by the different friends.

The day was such a success that it was planned to hold a similar gathering next year.

The friends all extended thanks to the Nordstrom's for their effort in planning and arranging for the gathering.

## STERLINGITES HAVE REUNION PICNIC

Initial Gathering At Wilson Bridge Proves Big Success; Plan Another Get-together For Next Year.

Highly successful was a gathering of Sterling settlers who held the first annual reunion picnic at the Wilson Bridge on Sunday, June 25.

The picnic was such a great success that it was unanimously voted to have another picnic next year. Mrs. Andrew Nordstrom and Mrs. Nels Munson were appointed to be in charge of the affair next year while Mrs. Ernest Armstrong and Nels F. Nelson were named on the program committee.

Chairman of the program was Frank Lindgren, Minneapolis, who introduced the following speakers: Mr. Frank Carlson, Superior, Sheriff of Douglas County; Mr. Fred Lisk, Sunrise, Minn.; Mrs. Ernest Armstrong, Wolf Creek and Mr. Louis Nelson, Sunrise, Minn.

Among the guests were Mr. and Mrs. Frank Carlson, Superior; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Carlson, Superior; Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Munson, Center City; Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Mattson and Mildred, Chisago City; Mr. and Mrs. John J. Johnson, Rush City; Mr. and Mrs. Fred M. Nelson, St. Croix Falls; Mrs. Anna Amundson, St. Croix Falls; Mr. and Mrs. Louis Nelson and Ethel, Amador; Mr. and Mrs. Nels Nelson, Amador; Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Nelson, Sunrise; Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Erickson, Sunrise; Mr. and Mrs. John Lindgren and family, Bass Lake; Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Nordstrom, Ella and Ardyce, Cushing; Mr. Erick Nordstrom, Cushing; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lindgren, Minneapolis; Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Anderson, Amador; Mr. and Mrs. Newell Fisk, Amador; Mr. and Mrs. Fred Fisk, Amador; Mr. and Mrs. Nels Munson and Selma, Grantsburg; Mr. and Mrs. Nels F. Nelson and family, Eureka Center; Mrs. Gust Sturm, Frederic; Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hedlund, Lindstrom Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Hoover and Wayne, Superior; Mr. and Mrs. Mason Fisk, St. Croix Falls; Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. Ryan, Sr., Superior; Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Rowland, Minneapolis; Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. Ryan, Jr., Superior; Miss Patsy Ryan, Miss Joan Ryan, Superior; Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Noyes and Raymond, Cushing; Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Armstrong, Wolf Creek.

## River Road Ramblings

April 18<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm the Sterling Eureka and Laketown Historical Society kicks off its 2013 season with a business meeting in the Memory Room, around the back of the Cushing Community Center. As per usual, the business part of the meeting will be mixed with a great deal of visiting, show and tell, and out-of-hibernation stories!

April 18<sup>th</sup> we will talk about our events for the season, including Memorial Day activities, the last weekend in June when we will be helping with the Midsummer festival on Saturday (the 29<sup>th</sup>) and the 75<sup>th</sup> annual Sterling old Settlers picnic on Sunday (the 30<sup>th</sup>). We haven't gotten details about Midsummer yet, but it has been held for several years now in various sites in Polk County. Check with us for more info.

I urge you to join us for the coming season. We have a great deal of fun planning, visiting, and doing these events, and it would be a shame not to let you in on the enjoyment too! We are an easy going group, who have in common that we like local history. A couple pieces of old barb wire, or a few old photos, or kitchen utensils can lead us into a wonderful discussion.

The events we are likely to be involved with this year include the Picnic, Memorial Day, the Polk County Fair, Doc Squirt day and Fun Days in Cushing, and the River Road Ramble (our 9<sup>th</sup> one?). We also have some work to do in the Memory room. Although the roof was patched last fall, there still seems to be a leak in one corner, so when that gets fixed, we will touch up the ceiling tiles with Kilz "cover everything" paint. I think one of ceiling tiles is stained so it looks a lot like St Francis of Assisi, so we may pry that one out and sell it on Ebay to make a fortune, especially now that the new Pope took the name of Francis ;-)

We are always interested in old photos to copy, items from the local area, old records and whatever reflects the history of our area. Everything we have in the two Memory rooms has been donated by folks who are generous to share their items. One of the goals we have is to open the Museum more often—for special events like family reunions, and a few regular days each month. Of course this takes volunteers who are willing to spend a few hours visiting with those who stop in. We do have many items and we continue to receive gifts from the neighbors. Recently we got a box of old photos and records from the Hach/Jansen family, two boxes of photos and items from Betty and Sherman Jensen including photos from Eureka, and miscellaneous items and some items I have been allowed to photocopy.

George Williamson brought in a 1930 baseball game score card booklet that came from the Erickson family (those from the River Road). I photographed each page. The teams were Bass Lake, Trade River, Almelund, Sunrise, Trade Lake, and other local communities. The players were likely born 1890-1910 and included Ranstrom, Westlund, Erickson, Williamson, and many more.

On a personal note, Margo, my wife of 41 years, had chemotherapy for breast cancer from last August through January. She had a left breast radical mastectomy March 11<sup>th</sup> and is recovering well from that. The bad news was that she got very sick by December and January, but that was a short term complication. The good news is that the chemo had completely gotten rid of the cancer in the breast and almost completely in the lymph nodes—so that means it should have gotten rid of any cancer that may have spread! The third part of treatment is 35 sessions of radiation, 5 days a week for most of April and May, and then the treatment is finished. So far, things are very positive!

My own battle with Myasthenia Gravis is going quite well. I found out I had it in May, got rather disabled through September, then with prednisone to slow my immune system improved greatly by October and have been pretty normal since. Of course taking lots of prednisone is not great for a person, and I give it credit for being 20lbs greater than last spring. I am trying to get rid of it.

I read about a new treatment where a machine squeezes a love handle, deep freezes and kills the fat cells and "melts" the fat away without dieting. It is quite expensive, so I have been thinking about using two ice cube trays and a C-clamp as a do-it-yourself trial. Follow our adventures on the internet at [Riverroadrambler.blogspot.com](http://Riverroadrambler.blogspot.com) where you can find out way more than you want to know!



Hope to see you at a meeting (third Thur 7pm of each month starting April Cushing Memory room) or at an event this season! Thank you for your cards, letters, and emails to Margo during her treatment. She expects to be up for the summer by Memorial Day if all goes well.  
 Russ Hanson

VS *Wolf Creek* AT *Bass Lake* DATE *Sep 22 1929*

	Pos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	AB	R	I	B	S	B	S	H	P	O	A	E	
<i>Burton</i>	1	+	S	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0													
<i>Everstrom</i>	2	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Emil E</i>	3	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Shauls</i>	4	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Winnon</i>	5	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Jergeson</i>	6	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Millison</i>	7	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Scammon</i>	8	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>McClure</i>	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<b>TOTAL</b>																									

(Can you decipher the Wolf Creek vs Bass Lake Sep 22, 1929 baseball game?)

*Bass Lake* VS *Trade Lake* AT *Trade Lake* DATE *June 8 1930*

	Pos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	AB	R	I	B	S	B	S	H	P	O	A	E	
<i>Bill R</i>	1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Emil E</i>	2	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Russell B</i>	3	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Ed Erickson</i>	4	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Geo W</i>	5	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Winnon</i>	6	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Vin P</i>	7	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>Walter E</i>	8	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<i>H. E. Johnson</i>	9	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+													
<b>TOTAL</b>		9	1	3	3	0	0	1	0	4	3	4	3	3	4	1	0								

Runs on Balls: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Two base Hits: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Three base Hits: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Runs: \_\_\_\_\_

**Elected Officers and Board Members  
Sterling Eureka and Laketown Historical  
Society November 2011**

**Chair - Russ Hanson**

2558 Evergreen Av, Cushing, WI 54006  
(715) 488-2776 (507-356-8877 Jan-Feb)  
russhanson@grantsburgtelcom.net

**Vice-chair - Mark Johnson**

2601 240th Ave  
St Croix Falls WI 54024

**Secretary/Treasurer - Donna Blair**

2677 240th Av  
St Croix Falls WI 54024

**Emeritus Chair – Marcie Marquardt**

[quietmeadows@lakeland.ws](mailto:quietmeadows@lakeland.ws)

**Executive Board Members –NEEDED!**

George Laier, Russ and Dottie Adams,  
LeRoy and Marlys Hedberg, Joan Swanson,  
Justin Swanson, Marcie Marquardt (I think!)

**Order a book from SELHS**

**Postage included in price**

\$13 A History of Making Maple Syrup  
\$18 St Croix River Road Ramblings 2010  
\$18 River Road Ramblings 2011  
\$18 The St Croix River Road  
\$18 History of Cushing Wisconsin I  
\$18 Stories of the Trade River Valley I  
\$18 Stories of the Trade River Valley II  
Check to SELHS, Box 731, Cushing, WI  
54006

All profits go to SELHS to preserve local  
history. Or go to Amazon.com and order.

Meetings are the 3rd Thursday of each  
month at 7:00 pm at the Cushing  
Community Center Back Entrance  
No Meetings December, January and  
February, March

Wanted! You as a volunteer for the  
Sterling Eureka and Laketown Historical  
Society and or the Sterling Picnic  
Committee. A little time and a lot of fun!

The Polk County Genealogical society is at  
the Luck Museum Monday of each month  
from noon until 3 pm. They will help you do  
research on your family history. No charge  
and no appointment needed. Email us at  
polkgen@gmail.com and check our website at  
[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wipolk/](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wipolk/)

*Do you have an email address? If so, send it  
to [SELHSCUSHING@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SELHSCUSHING@GMAIL.COM) and we  
will keep you up-to-date on what is happening  
with regular releases and send our  
newsletters directly and in color!*

*SELHS is working together with the Sterling  
Picnic committee to help celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup>  
annual Sterling Old Settlers Picnic. This will be  
on Sunday June 30<sup>th</sup> at the Cushing Community  
Center—noon potluck. A special program will  
celebrate the past 75 years*

*We are also putting together a book  
commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> picnic and are looking  
for old photos of the Sterling picnic and area as  
well as short family histories and photos to  
include! They must be into Russ Hanson by  
May 15<sup>th</sup> of 2013! See address in the  
President's column. If you are from the area or  
your ancestors, don't miss out in getting your  
family included!*

*Memberships are due each June. Come to Sterling  
Picnic on June 30<sup>th</sup> at the Cushing Community Center and  
renew for another year and see if we have a membership  
premium this year! We depend on your membership and  
contributions and book sales for our operating funds, so be  
generous!*

*Make a check to SELHS and send it to  
SELHS*

*Box 731 Cushing, WI 54006*

*Then join us at a 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday 7 pm meeting at Cushing  
and help us with the Overhaul and Refurbishing of the  
Memory Rooms. We need ideas, good minds, good backs,  
people who can paint ceiling tiles and people who like to  
sort through old photos and items and organize them*

*We have been thinking about having a few history  
programs, like we did a few years ago, so if you have ideas,  
or have a collection, or have something you would like to  
tell about or learn about let us know!*



## Sterling Eureka and Laketown Membership Form

*Send completed form to*

**SELHS.**  
**P.O. BOX 731**  
**Cushing WI 54006**  
**(LOOK AT THE**  
**DATE AFTER**  
**YOUR NAME**  
**On mailing label**  
**For the last time you**  
**Joined (i.e. 2011)**

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State ____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email _____

### *Annual Membership Levels*

<i>Individual</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Life (ind or couple)</i>
<b>\$10.00</b>	<b>\$5.00</b>	<b>\$100.00</b>

*All memberships in excess of \$10 as well as any additional donations to the SEL Historical Society are fully deductible.*

Who is this mystery person? Hint—he met his wife Marlys while fitting her roller skates in the Big Hall (above the Cushing Co-op Grocery which was later Vern’s Market)



Give up?

Leroy Hedberg

*Attend the Sterling Picnic dressed with clothes from any decade before 2000 and win a prize!*

**SELHS**  
**Box 731**  
**Cushing, WI 54006**