

SELHS News

Newsletter of the Sterling Eureka and Laketown History Society

Volume 6, No.2

Memory Room – Cushing Community Center

July, 2012

Email selhscushing@gmail.com

Website <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wiselhs/>

The Birmingham Wolf Creek Store

Eight miles up the St Croix River from St. Croix Falls is the tiny settlement of Wolf Creek. It is near the mouth of where the creek enters the St. Croix River. For centuries, it has been a stopping place on the St. Croix River.



The Birmingham Store and Home in Wolf Creek

It is at the head of 6 miles of rapids that before the 1907 power dam in St. Croix Falls made navigation through this stretch treacherous by canoe and bateau. Supplies coming up river were off loaded at St. Croix or Taylors Falls (MN and WI had different names for the area that was composed of a set of steep rapids and short falls). They were transported north by road along either side of the river until they reached near the mouth of Wolf Creek where the river again was navigable.

In the winter of 1831-32, Joseph Renshaw Brown built an Indian trading post in this area. Initially, it appears that it was located on the MN bank, although later trading posts were

located on the east bank of the river, the site of Wolf Creek.

Wolf Creek was the stopping place after a walk or oxen trip up river, where 8 miles through the heavily wooded trails was slow and often needed delays to repair washed out sections where rains created new cuts in the road from the steep banks along the WI road.

The first trading post at Wolf Creek was burned in 1832 by the Indian agent, Henry Schoolcraft who didn't like the rumors that J. R. Brown was selling spirituous liquors to the local Indians. He also didn't like it that Brown had gotten a license from one of Schoolcraft's



The Fred W. Fisk Store – 1899 –possibly on the same site as the Birmingham store. Either it was replaced or remodeled into The bigger store

subordinates. Schoolcraft would have never allowed this location as it was on the boundary of Dakota and Ojibwe disputed territory, and it brought members of both tribes together, which

often led to fights. Just down river at the Lions Club park, one of the bigger battles is remembered by the historical marker there.

Well, Wolf Creek remained a small settlement with a power dam on the creek built by Samuel Deneen in about 1855, a school started then, the trading post, and other support for local farmers, settlers just coming into the area along with loggers who had been around since the 1837 treaty opened the lands to logging.

Massive log drives came down the St. Croix river every spring sending logs at first to a mill at St Croix Falls, Marine on the St. Croix, and Franconia. One early spring flood flushed the logs through these local mills so they kept going on down until they got to some stillwater farther down river. The loggers decided to put sawmills there, near Joseph R Brown's brand new log county courthouse, government offices, hotel and home on the west bank of the north edge of the stillwater (which of course became the city of Stillwater).

Well, Wolf Creek remained small, and calm except for the continuous history liquor and the excesses that came from folks of all origins imbibing to excess. The loggers spread, the Native Americans, and even the local farmers could be found on a Saturday night overdoing the drinking.

In 1888 things changed for Wolf Creek. Loggers, tired of huge log jams down river at the falls, began to build the huge wooden dam at the Nevers home along the St. Croix a mile or so downriver from Wolf Creek (which by then had tried on different names including Avondale, Eightmile and Wolf Creek Crossings). The presence of two to three hundred builders in the area made the town boom. [Read Rosemarie Vezina Braatz history of Nevers Dam](#)

Several stores and new businesses sprang up. For one summer there was even a newspaper. The boom lasted a decade or so but as the 1900s came, the inexhaustible supply of white pines up river were exhausted and by 1914 no more log drives came through. Nevers became a water regulating dam to hold back water until 3pm when it was released to reach the electric generating plant at

St Croix Falls in time for the folks coming home from work to turn on their electric lights all the way to the Twin Cities.

Wolf Creek returned to slumber. With the depression, the mill was torn down, stores closed and the core of a church, school, bar, store and post office remained. The main last store was called the "Birmingham Store."



James and Alice Birmingham who ran it (she was the post mistress) from 1911 until 1940, (James died in 1939). Daughter Marie Jeannette



My grandparents and mother (Eugene, Nettie and Alberta Hanson) rented the store for three

years.



Alice Birmingham sitting on the store steps. She and her husband, James came from running a store in Superior to Wolf Creek about 1911 and ran the store until he died in 1939. She rented it to others after that. She was the postmaster for nearly 30 years.



In 1918, at the end of World War II, the Birmingham's nephew, Gerald Shiely returned from the war and visited Wolf Creek. He is in his uniform –the tall fellow.

With him are Alice and James Birmingham center with their daughter Jeannette Marie, the John Hurly family, and the Day and Peterson families and Mathilda Jensen who worked in the store.



The store and house are connected in the back.

From the President Russ Hanson

Thanks to all of you who renewed your memberships after the last newsletter. I am working on getting the list of members up-to-date on my computer. Send your email address to selhscushing@gmail.com to get updates on our activities.

Hope to see you at some of our events this summer and at our next meeting!

This newsletter has a personal connection with the Wolf Creek Store. In 1939, James Birmingham died and his widow rented the store to my grandparents, Eugene and Nettie Hanson. Nettie and Gene both took the postmaster test, with Nettie scoring almost double his score! She became the postmaster and together with their daughter, Alberta, my mother, ran the store for the next few years.

When Mom got married in Oct 1942, Eugene and Nettie gave up the store as too much to handle along with their handicapped son, Kenneth "Buddy" Hanson.

Recently, Alice Birmingham's granddaughter, Sherry of Chicago has been sharing information with us about her grandparents including some of the photos.

My wife of 40 years, Margo, has just started a year long treatment for breast cancer in Rochester at Mayo. We will be spending more time at our Pine Island, MN home during this time. I am newly diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis, so between the two of us we are expecting health problems to be foremost the coming year, and then back to normal!

Russ Hanson



Photos: Eugene and Nettie Hanson above and Alberta and Kenneth "Buddy" Hanson left. They rented the Birmingham store 1940-42

Wanted: photos, stories, and other information for a new SELHS book, **The History of Wolf Creek, WI.** Information due by November 2012, publication spring of 2013. Contact Russ Hanson 715-488-2776 or riverroadrambler@gmail.com or mail 2558

Evergreen Av
Cushing, WI 54006.



Alternate phone number: 507-356-8877 Pine Island MN

What are these farm machines?

Answers to what they are hidden in the newsletter!

**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)
russ Hanson@grantsburgtelcom.net

Vice-chair - Mark Johnson
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024

Secretary/Treasurer - Donna Blair
St. Croix Falls, WI 54006

Emeritus Chair – Marcie Marquardt
quietmeadows@lakeland.ws

Executive Board Members
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.

Coming soon: *Alabama Corners, the story of
settlers from Alabama state coming to
Laketown Township in the 1860s and their
history.*

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

The Polk County Genealogical society is at
the Luck Museum the second and fourth
Mondays 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/

*Do you have an email address? If so, send it
to **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!*



Wolf Creek Bar - -1940s?
The farm photos from the earlier page are
a hay loader to pull behind a wagon and
load the hay and an early hay rake to
gather the hay into rows or haycocks.

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

Individual	Student	Life (ind or couple)
\$10.00	\$5.00	\$100.00

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

The Wolf Creek Flour mill in 1908 then owned by Englin and Monty stood just NE of the current bridge. The dam was just upstream from the bridge. The first mill and dam were put in by the late 1850s by Samuel Deneen. The sand barrens were a



great wheat producing area for a few years in the late 1800s and produced flour for a large area.

Cushing, WI 54006

Box 731

SELHS