

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – EAU CLAIRE

THE SURVIVAL OF SMALL-TOWN WISCONSIN:

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF WINTER SINCE 1905

BY:

VINCENT D. MUSSEHL

HISTORY 489: RESEARCH SEMINAR

PROFESSOR: DR. ROBERT GOUGH

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ABSTRACT

Winter, a community in Northern Wisconsin comprised of a township and a village with a collective population of less than 1,200 residents, has survived numerous difficulties through the twentieth century. The community has surpassed the cease of the logging industry, faced the failed attempts at farming in the Wisconsin cutover region, endured through the Great Depression, and progressed to the twenty-first century because of communal ties. These ties were manifested through the several bonds that the individual formed, including relations with community organizations, community events, churches, businesses, schools, friends, and family. Without these communal ties, the Winter community may have suffered a fate similar to many other small towns in the Chippewa Valley and elsewhere in Wisconsin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is a result of the assistance of several individuals that have all contributed some piece to my research. I must first and foremost thank the late John Martin, who was also passionate about Winter area history and devoted a great deal of time to researching the area, as attested in his various collections and writings. Laura Hunkel has also added significant contributions to this research, another passionate writer and Winter historian. I am also indebted to the anonymous writer of the diary that Robert Hardy has provided me with, which has provided me with a new and different perspective on my research.

I am also thankful for the following individuals, who have all contributed material or helped to guide me in my research, recently and through the years, in no particular order: Gayle Johnson, Carol Buckholtz, the late Theresa Denenny, Janet Topp, Irma Biermann, Esther Musser, Caroline (Martin) Benson, Tienne Linden, Arlene (Twink) Bishop, Joy Kielcheski, Linda Olson, Eppy Sundberg, Alice Skogen, Lea (Johansen) Geringer, Sheryll Keys, Evelyn Swedberg, Violet Olson, Paul Thorbjornsen, Joe McClaine, Meredith and Nanci Rickert, Patti Vaverka, Robert Schuck, Louise Ladenthin, and Robert Hardy.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the editors that have so diligently preserved the history of the community throughout the years in the *Sawyer County Gazette*: the founder, Thomas Noyes (editor 1908-1949), Roy Martin (editor 1949-1976), John Martin (editor 1976-1990), Meredith Rickert (editor 1990-2011), and Sue Johnston (starting in 2011).

Much assistance is credited to the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire students, staff, and faculty who have also helped me tremendously in my research: Dr. Robert Gough, professor of history, my undergraduate advisor and capstone cooperating professor; Greg Kocken, head of

special collections and archives at McIntyre Library; Celeste (Lark) Keating-Hadlock, archives assistant; Dr. John Mann, professor of history, and Dr. St. Germaine, professor of history.

Finally, I must thank and encourage those historians in the Winter community, and elsewhere, that continue to preserve the community's history, one day at a time...

It is to you that I dedicate this work.

INTRODUCTION

The history of small-town Wisconsin has often been overlooked. The small towns that dot the northern frontier of Wisconsin have also shared an equally important role in the shaping of the state. One such community, Winter, located in southern Sawyer County, has survived the nearly impossible challenges from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth and even still to this day. This is a remarkable accomplishment when so many other communities, especially within the vicinity of Winter, have largely depopulated or eventually even become abandoned. Winter is exceptional in that it is one of the smallest townships and incorporated villages in

Wisconsin (2010 U.S. census records a population of only 852 and 233 residents respectively),¹ yet it boasts several amenities that larger cities offer: a public school system, grocery store, public library, post office, newspaper, bank, automobile sales and repair shop, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) office, as well as several churches, taverns, and motels. Outside the village, in the Winter township, several resorts, campgrounds, and restaurants can also be numbered among the different amenities that are easily accessible to village residents. It is a reminiscent of the popular small town depicted in media or perhaps on a postcard; friendly waves and hellos are common, along with morning coffee “clubs” gathering at the local café to catch up with each other.



Figure 1: Winter is located in southern Sawyer County, indicated by the red point on this map of Wisconsin.

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census. “American Fact Finder, 2010.” <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?ref=geo&refresh=t#none> (accessed April 1, 2011).

The challenges this community has faced are numerous: the decline of the logging industry, the failure on yeoman farmers of the cutover land left behind by the logging industries, abandonment by the railroad, the Great Depression, and the consistent lack of industry which still plagues the village today. Any numbers of these challenges have, in fact, proven to be fatal to several other communities in Wisconsin, often leaving behind little more than a street name to remember them by. Although the challenges that Winter has faced have been numerous, it has survived primarily because of the cooperation and communal ties of the community members themselves.

This paper will examine how community ties has positively affected and enabled the Winter community to survive since the beginning of its existence in the late eighteenth century until the twenty-first century. The term communal ties will be defined as any cooperating group within the community: friendships, church and other community organizations, the school system, businesses including farmers, and sometimes even family networks. Community will be defined as the people of the township and villages of Winter, collectively encompassing an area of approximately 286 square miles. The village will be defined as the central business district of Winter, while the township (or town in general) will include the area surrounding the village. It is important to note that the village and township were not separate entities until 1973 when the Village of Winter was incorporated.

To accomplish my goal, I will use other scholars' works that are similar to mine as models or guides for my research. The primary difference between my research project and the works of other scholars, however, is that my research will focus primarily on the internal factors that enabled the community to survive. Also in contrast to other scholars, my research will be focusing on the community of Winter. Little research has been conducted on this community,

especially in this aspect, as most historians have tended to explain the history of Winter in a historical narrative context, or in the context of other community or social histories (such as through Hayward, a city located approximately thirty-five miles east of Winter).

Several social or community research projects have been conducted prior to my research. Many of these papers, however, largely focus on the genesis of the community. Jan Pruitt explains in her research paper, “History of Rice Lake,”² for example, that the shaping of the Rice Lake community was responsible because of the Native Americans, lumberjacks, farmers, and then businessmen. Another scholar, Orry Walz, argues that the economy and corresponding employment were the most important factors in his research paper “Beginnings of a Community: Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1860-1888.”³ Lloyd Owens claims in his research paper, “A Mini-History of Eau Claire,” that Eau Claire was founded on lumber and grew as a direct result of the lumbering operations. He further explains that if industry was not introduced at basically the right place in the right time, Eau Claire’s history would have followed a much different path.⁴

Some authors have based their research projects on the very opposite of the founding of communities and focused rather on the decline. In “The History of Progress,” author Kris Schmitt argues that the end of the lumbering era doomed the small-town of Progress in central Wisconsin.⁵ Rachel Kudeck explains that the Wisconsin town, Monterey, declined because of

² Jan Pruitt, “The History of Rice Lake” (English 110 Comp. Paper, 1977), University Historical Collection 67, Box 1. Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

³ Orry Walz, “Beginnings of a Community: Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1860 -1888” (B.A. Thesis, 1985), University Historical Collection 67, Box 1. Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

⁴ Lloyd Owens, “A Mini-History of Eau Claire” (B.A. Thesis, 1975), University Historical Collection 67, Box 1. Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

⁵ Kris Schmitt, “The History of Progress” (B.A. Thesis, n.d.), University Historical Collection 67, Box 1. Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

economic factors including the fall of not only business but farming in her paper, “Business in Monterey, WI: 1920 to 1980: The Decline of a Community.”⁶

Other scholars attempt to construct local histories without a defined thesis, but with a goal to retell the community’s history. This is often accomplished with the research being explained in a narrative context. In one research paper by an unknown author, “The Early History of District One, Town of Washington,” the goal is to explain the earliest history of the Town of Washington in comparison to different settlements in Eau Claire County.⁷ Judge William Bailey had a similar goal, although much more intense and complex in his work *History of Eau Claire County*.⁸ Yet another historian, P.M. O’Brien, also provides a narrative history in his book *The Springbrook Saga: The Settlement and Growth of Eastern Dunn County*. O’Brien’s research is different from the aforementioned, however, because it explains not only the founding and growth of a community, but also its decline and abandonment.⁹

Still other historians have provided community histories in a much broader context with intricate theses or goals. One of the most important works which I will use as a model for my research is by Jane Pederson. She relies on several different sources, including quantitative analysis, photographs, and different town and organizations’ records to depict the history of rural Wisconsin (using Trempealeau County as a model) in her monograph, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970*. Pederson, however, focuses

⁶ Rachel E. Kudeck, “Business in Monterey, WI 1920 to 1980: The Decline of a Community” Archives Series 333, Box 13, Folder 28. Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

⁷ “The Early History of District 1” (B.A. Thesis, n.d.), University Historical Collection 67, Box 1. Special Collections and Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

⁸ W.F. Bailey, *History of Eau Claire County, Wisconsin Past and Present; Including an Account of the Cities, Towns and Villages of the County* (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1914).

⁹ O’Brien, P.M *The Springbrook Saga: The Settlement and Growth of Eastern Dunn County*. Brandon, FL: Printing Professionals & Publishers, Inc., 1994.

mainly on the many European ethnicities that have developed and maintained the communities, while my research will focus on the importance of communal ties rather than ethnicity.¹⁰ Winter is different in this extent; while the community did see some foreign immigration (largely from Scandinavia), the community was less affected by ethnicity as Winter tended to be a “second” or “next” stop settlement for many pioneers.¹¹

Another important work that will also serve as a model is Robert Gough’s monograph, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*. Although he does not focus on a particular community as my research will, he does provide excellent insight of the region during the early pioneer stages of the settlement era – including Winter. Furthermore, Gough provides the reader with several firsthand accounts of several different histories, effectively using a variety of different oral histories, as well as some data from local and state governments.¹²

Other extensive monographs include Mark Wyman’s *Wisconsin’s Frontier*. Wyman explains the history of Wisconsin since before its founding through the lenses of several different disciplines including sociology, political science, and economics largely through the nineteenth century.¹³ L. Kessinger’s *The History of Buffalo County, Wisconsin* is written similar to

¹⁰ Jane M. Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

¹¹ Caroline (Martin) Benson, “Remembering Winter” (essay, manuscript from John Martin collection, Winter, WI, c. pre-2005), n.p.; Laura Hunkel, “Happy Centennial, Winter!” (essay, manuscript in possession of the author, c. 2005), n.p.; John Martin, “Winter A True Happyland” (essay, manuscript in possession of the author, 2005), n.p.; Lea (Johansen) Geringer, “Memories of Happyland” (essay, manuscript in possession of the author, c. 2005) n.p.; Irma Biermann, Interview by author, Winter, WI June 23, 2005; Author Unknown, (diary, manuscript from Robert Hardy, n.d.), n.p. These sources allude to either themselves or their families as having migrated from elsewhere in the country, rather than from foreign countries.

¹² Robert Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1997).

¹³ Mark Wyman, *The Wisconsin Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

Wyman's monograph, however, in a narrower context – focusing on a single county of Wisconsin instead of the state as a whole.¹⁴ Still another scholar, Tim Pfaff, assembles several different communities' histories to create a collective monograph on the Chippewa Valley in *Settlement and Survival: Building Towns in the Chippewa Valley, 1850-1925* based on a museum exhibit at the Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.¹⁵

In summary, my work will be different from other scholars for a variety of different reasons. First, I will argue that the survival of Winter was largely a result of internal factors (i.e. communal ties). Second, I will focus on the Winter community largely between the years of 1905 to 2005 – basically focusing on a community in its entirety, a feat which no other historian has completed. Third, my work will be recent; despite some writer's essays on particular topics, the conducted histories are fairly dated. Fourth, I will utilize some sources that have recently become available or have not been used before. Finally, rather than explaining the history in simply a chronological format, I will construct the research chronologically and by theme.

In order to successfully accomplish these goals, I have examined a variety of different sources. Primary sources are crucial for this research and several works have been reviewed, including most importantly the local newspaper of the community which was published weekly since 1908, a personal diary from a pioneer of the area, professor of history Robert Gough's *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*, several different essays and oral histories of settlers and following generations, and other less significant (but not necessarily less important) sources.

¹⁴ L. Kessinger, *The History of Buffalo County* (Alma, WI: 1888).

¹⁵ Tim Pfaff, *Settlement and Survival: Building Towns in the Chippewa Valley, 1850-1925* (Eau Claire, WI: Chippewa Valley Museum Press, 1994).

Information from the *Sawyer County Gazette* will be utilized with various sources, when relevant, including oral histories, essays, and United States census information to explain different trends throughout the community's history and how the community members were either initiated these trends or affected by them. Some of these sources have not yet been used for research, or have not been used most effectively. In order to use these materials effectively, cross-referencing sources will be extremely important in order to create any viable conclusions. Utilizing other scholars' or authors' works as secondary sources (explained earlier) to help verify information and create a more complete picture of the research will also be important, both for verification and for modeling my own research.

PART I: BACKGROUND – PRE-1905

When starting from the beginning of any history of either Americas, it is hard to disregard the impact that the American Indians first had on the land which the Europeans would later settle. Winter was in an area that was once part of the Chippewa (French, “Ojibwe”) Indians. The United States government obtained the land under the provisions of the Treaty of 1837, which resulted in the cessation of approximately 102,400 acres of land¹⁶ encompassing much of northern Wisconsin, including Sawyer County, as shown in Figure 2. The total value of the Chippewa cessation to Wisconsin was some

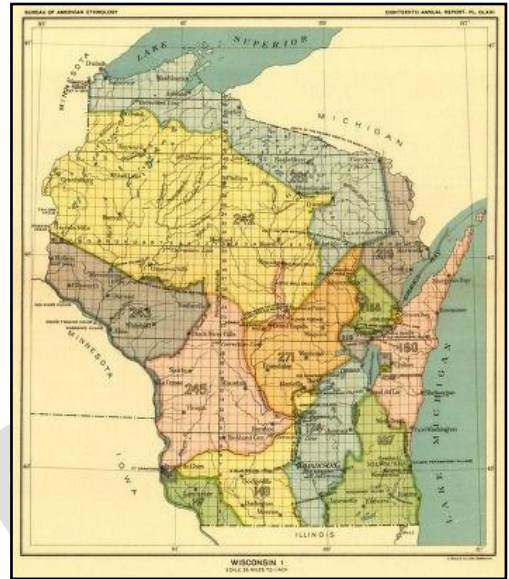


Figure 2: The section labeled "242" displays the land ceded to the federal government as a result of the Treaty of 1837. Source: Oklahoma State University Library.

170 billion board feet of timber, 150 billion tons of iron ore, and 19 million acres of land¹⁷ (to Wisconsin total).¹⁸ Nearly 200 years later Sawyer County is still home to over 7,000 members of the Lac Courte Oreilles band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, just a few miles northwest of Winter.

Winter pioneer Caroline (Martin) Benson described the northern forests as having “...once covered the hills and valleys of Wisconsin, forests so grand they can hardly be imagined

¹⁶ Kappler, Charles J. ed., “Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties,” Oklahoma State University Library <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol2/treaties/chi0482.htm#mn1> (accessed 15 February, 2011).

¹⁷ David R. Wrone, “The Economic Impact of the 1837 and 1842 Chippewa Treaties,” *American Indian Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 332.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 332.

now.”¹⁹ Such an abundance of natural resources would naturally attract prospectors. Lumber barons such as the Edward Hines Lumber Company and the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company turned their eyes towards the valuable region, and reportedly in 1856 the first white pine was cut and sent down the mighty Mississippi to New Orleans, although most trees were not cut until the early twentieth century. This vastly exploited territory required the effort of thousands of individuals to harvest the enormous ancient pines. As a response to this growing industry, lumber camps began to develop and initiated the creation not only of Winter, but many of the surrounding communities as well, including Loretta, Draper, Radisson, and Park Falls.²⁰ Camps would evolve into frontier settlements and eventually into towns with hotels, restaurants, churches, and housing. This period, according to Sawyer County historian Eldon Marple, was “...a period of romantic activity, almost legendary in its remoteness from our times and understanding.”²¹ Indeed, the population of Sawyer County increased from 1,977 residents in 1890 at the time of the first census of the county to 3,593 in 1900 – an increase of approximately 182 percent, attracting those who wished to become “legendary” themselves.²²

At the beginning of the logging industry in northern Wisconsin, the primary means of transportation involved either rivers or makeshift trails. This became more difficult with increasing numbers of job seekers and potential settlers. Once the camps had become

¹⁹ Benson, “Remembering Winter,” n.p.

²⁰ Winter Area Chamber of Commerce (WACOC), “Heritage and History,” <http://www.winterwi.com/logging2.htm> (accessed 16 October, 2010).

²¹ Eldon Marple, “Pine Logs and White Water on the West Fork,” Sawyer County Historical Society, http://www.sawycountyhist.org/west_fork.html (accessed 15 February, 2011).

²² University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/> (accessed 1 April, 2011).

established, however, a transformation to the landscape began to take place that would change the frontier of northern Wisconsin forever – the railroad.

The railroad not only facilitated the migration of pioneers to the area, it also created a feeling of opportunity in the eyes of the settlers. Surely a frontier community boasting a railroad must become permanent and thus, civilized. It was not until John Winter (for which the community was named after), superintendent of the Omaha Railroad line, built the railway connecting Rice Lake to Park Falls in 1902 (and all the “in-between” infant communities) and was established when settlers began to steadily arrive in Winter. Prior to

this, it was a settlement that was primarily a stopping place for lumbermen and occasional visitors, who were often lodged by the community’s first resident, John LeBeouf.²³ LeBeouf, a French-

Canadian, had once been a logger himself when he moved to the area after obtaining a quit-claim deed for his property in 1889.²⁴ Indeed before the railroad, Winter boasted only a school and a few scattered camps or farms.²⁵

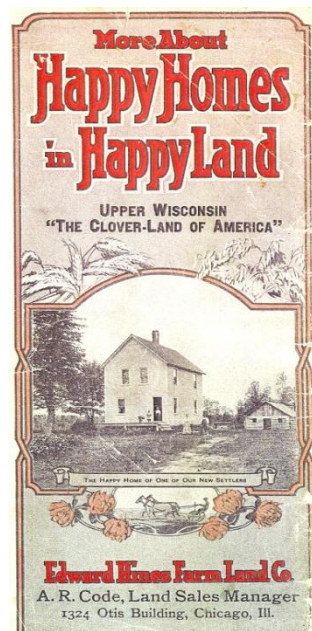


Figure 3: A brochure created by Edward Hines Farm Land Co. Image courtesy of the author.

* * *

Eventually the lumber in northern Wisconsin began to wane, forcing lumber companies to proceed to their next line of business – the ravaged land left over, the cutover land. After the

²³ Leighton D. Morris, “From White Pines and White Tails: A Social Study of Sawyer County” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Superior, 1958), n.p.

²⁴ Eldon M. Marple, *The Visitor Who Came to Stay: Legacy of the Hayward Area* (Hayward, WI: The Country Print Shop, 1971), 53.

²⁵ *Sawyer County Registry* (Hayward, WI: Sawyer County Historical Society, 1967), n.p.

lumber was exploited, thousands of acres of wilderness cutover land remained. To rid themselves of all this territory, lumber companies such as Edward Hines began to develop farmland offices and clever marketing tactics, publishing advertisements all over the Midwest to attract the prospective settlers from all over, including overseas, to what they referred to as “Happy Land – the Clover-Land of America” as show in Figure 3, a brochure published by Edward Hines in the early twentieth century. The fortunes and opportunities of Winter were seemingly endless, at least in the eyes of the prospective pioneers and farmers, who would soon call Winter their home.

PART II: THE FORMATIVE YEARS – 1900s to 1920s

Perhaps communal ties were most important during the infancy years of Winter, approximately 1900 to 1929. Sawyer County at the turn of the twentieth century, according to historian Paul Haas, was a “...raw, boisterous frontier, yeasty with opportunity and cheap land, vigorously asserting that here a man could raise grain, potatoes, and upright children.”²⁶ To those prospective settlers attracted by Edward Hines’ attractive marketing tactics these terms were quite adequate – especially the prospects of “opportunity” and “cheap land.” With the exception of what would become the City of Hayward, this would have been fairly representative of much of Sawyer County, which had been recently formed in 1883 out of former pieces of Ashland and Chippewa counties. Winter was not incorporated until 1905; originally it was a piece of the Town of Hayward. Other neighboring communities also found their beginning as a branch from Hayward, including Radisson, Reserve, and Sand Lake; Lenroot did the same, but not until 1909.²⁷

Attracting Settlers and Taming the Land

Indeed if it were not for the efforts of the lumber companies to rid themselves of their vast landholdings, Winter may have not developed further past the logging era. It might have met a fate similar to that of several other small towns in Wisconsin. One such community, also in the Chippewa Valley, ironically called Progress, did not survive long after the withdrawal of the lumber industry, having essentially become abandoned in 1925.²⁸ Other towns closer to Winter

²⁶ Paul Haas, “The Suppression of John F. Deitz: An Episode of the Progressive Era in Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Summer 1974): 263.

²⁷ Industrial Commission, *The Wisconsin Blue Book 1913* (Madison: Democrat Printing Co., State Printer: 1913), 89.

²⁸ Schmitt, “The History of Progress,” n.p.

in Sawyer County have also met their peaceful decline (although they have not become completely abandoned or unpopulated) with the absence of the lumber industry, such as Lemington, Loretta-Draper, and Couderay.

By colorful depictions described by historian Robert Gough as “lavish,”²⁹ the lumber companies promised fertile, inexpensive land. The creators of these advertisements were instructed to be fairly creative in their design and exaggerate the area as they faced competition from promoters of the Dakotas, Montana, and parts of Canada.³⁰ These advertisements were “crammed with pictures of schools, hanging deer and fish, crops, rough cabins, and farmers,” according to Marple. Good cutover land was listed for \$4 to \$8 per acre,³¹ although prices as little as \$1.75 an acre in 1900 were reported.³² Still these depictions were well-received by would-be settlers ready for change.

One settler saw a similar advertisement while living in South Dakota at the time. Long-time Winter resident Lea (Johansen) Geringer recalls her father having read about Happy Land in Wisconsin while living in South Dakota and the “...wonderful opportunity the land provided,” that inspired him to pursue the land in Winter. The land was “of inestimable value” and was comprised of “fertile ground, [where] hunting and fishing was at its best” as well as a place where “tame fruits...grew,” according to Geringer.³³ Her father was one of the few that inspected

²⁹ Edward Hines Farm Land Company, “More About Happy Homes in Happy Land” (brochure, in the possession of the author, c. 1900), n.p.

³⁰ Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*, 37.

³¹ Eldon M. Marple, *A History of the Hayward Lakes Region...Through the Eyes of the Visitor Who Came and Stayed* (Hayward, WI: Chicago Bay Grafix, 1976), 91. By today’s equivalent, \$4 to \$8 per acre would approximate between \$100 to \$200 acres per acre.

³² Malcolm Rosholt, *The Battle of Cameron Dam* (Rosholt, WI: 1974), 12.

³³ Lea Geringer, “Memories of Happyland” (essay, manuscript in possession of the author, c. 2005), n.p.

the land before he made the purchase at the Winter land office. Gough explains that many settlers did not even survey their prospective land in the cutover region. Some made the purchase in the winter months when the ground was snow-covered, only to realize that, in at least one instance, the land was a swamp.³⁴

The wife of another future yeoman farmer recorded in her diary (see Appendix A) her deep concern and uncertainty when her husband was inspecting land in the Winter area, worrying about finances but still imagining herself “running around the woods with Sonny [her son], hunting wild flowers while the birds are singing overhead.”³⁵ To this woman and even her husband, the promising advertisement seemed directed almost specifically towards them – people unsure of success in their future but certain they wanted change.

Alas, these advertisements attracting settlers were successful. They attracted those looking for a different lifestyle, a chance to better their lives and be liberated from the constraints of the employment and confinements of the city. Happy Land was a place where a man (and his family) could rise from almost nothing. Sawyer County grew to 8,243 residents in 1920 – an increase of nearly 230 percent since 1900.³⁶ The *Sawyer County Gazette* even provided a settler countdown, which at the close of 1920 boasted 77 new settlers that year in Winter, complete with first and last names.³⁷ Furthermore, the *Gazette* itself even advertised settlement to the community, encouraging residents to speak favorably of Winter to attract more settlers in an

³⁴ Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*, 39.

³⁵ Diary, (manuscript from Robert Hardy, n.d.), n.p.

³⁶ University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” (accessed 1 April, 2011).

³⁷ “How Many New Settlers This Year for the Community,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), December 30, 1920, 1.

article titled “Stand Up For Your Town” published in 1912.³⁸ One of these settlers moved to the area after making a down payment of \$250. Once he arrived to Happy Land he had only \$31³⁹ after ticket expenses to support his wife and two children.⁴⁰

While the advertisements luring the pioneers were successful, actually taming the land was another matter. Throughout the formative years, yeoman farmers encountered countless troubles. Clearing the land was an endless back-breaking chore. The season was short and the climate was challenging. Furthermore, the earth was difficult to sow, as rocks, roots, and, of course, stumps all made things more difficult. Leah Geringer arrived with her parents in 1925, recalling that the rocks “equaled 35 wagonloads to an acre of field.”⁴¹ To make things even more challenging, the land was later found to be too acidic for many farming ventures.⁴² Benson remembers a song once sung by the yeoman farmers, expressing their frustration with their purchases.⁴³

“A Letter To The Land Agent”

Remwhen you sold me
This rock piece of ground?
I couldn't really see it then;
For snow was all around.

You said I'd never find a rock
Upon the farm I'd found
And you took a double-bitted axe
And sunk it in the ground.

³⁸ “Stand Up For Your Town,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 24, 1912, 1.

³⁹ Approximately \$380 in 2010.

⁴⁰ Diary, (manuscript from Robert Hardy, n.d.), n.p.

⁴¹ Geringer, “Memories of Happyland,” n.p.

⁴² Joy Kielcheski, Linda Olson, and Eppy Sundberg, *Winter, Wisconsin...Happyland*, VHS, produced by Rev. Scott Larson. (Foley, MN: Corban Communications, 1995).

⁴³ Benson, “Remembering Winter,” n.p.

Ten years I've been upon this place,
Of rocks I have just stacks,
And, gosh, I wish you'd tell me friend,
Just where you sank that axe."

Songs like these and support from the southern part of the state helped encouraged the farmer to brave through their difficulties. According to Marple, the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture experimented with the breeding of new crops for the north, and provided settlers with bulletins of tips to help them. There were also conventions

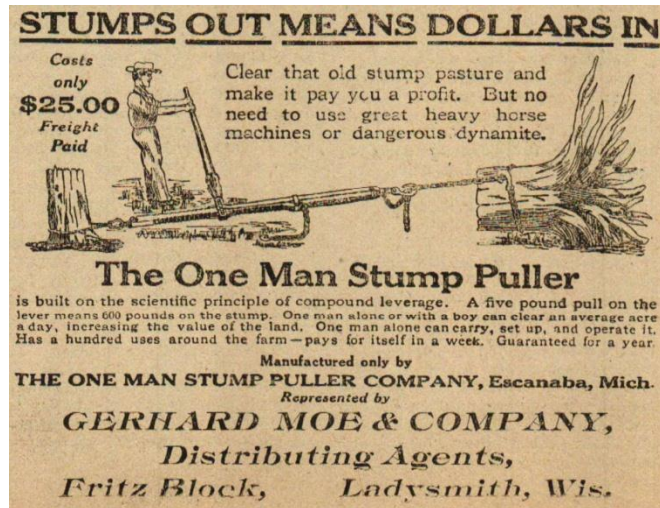


Figure 4: Advertisement depicting stump puller. Image Source: *Sawyer County Gazette*, November 21, 1912.

throughout the cutover region that demonstrated the latest technology, usually in stump pulling. For those with extra money, hiring out to rid the stumps was also an option, as depicted in the advertisement in the local newspaper shown in Figure 4.⁴⁴ Many farmers even farmed around the stumps during their first years in Winter.⁴⁵ The difficulties sometimes resulted in settlers' discouragement and eventual desertion of their properties. For those that did remain, the town became the "hub of small farm life,"⁴⁶ a place for social activities as well as business and other communal purposes.

⁴⁴ "Stumps Out Means Dollars In," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 21, 1912, 1.

⁴⁵ Kielcheski, Olson, and Sundberg, *Winter, Wisconsin...Happyland*.

⁴⁶ Laura Hunkel, "Happy Centennial, Winter!" (essay, manuscript in possession of the author, c. 2005), n.p.

Information Exchange

The exchange of information was intricate in the formation and maintenance of communal ties in the early twentieth century. The community relied on news of the outside world from visitors, letters, and the community newspaper, the *Sawyer County Gazette*. Marple referred to a newspaper as the "...skein that binds a community together..."⁴⁷ Nearly every week, throughout the majority of the twentieth century, but most importantly during the formative years, a front-page column of the *Sawyer County Gazette* was devoted to "Local Happenings: A Record of Things of Interest Which You, Your Friends and Neighbors Are Doing." For \$1.50 annual subscription,⁴⁸ residents of the community would have all the news (including local gossip) at their fingertips.

This news consisted largely of visitors to and from the community, birth announcements, weddings, school happenings, work projects, and even minor election news. One excerpt from an issue in 1908 provides the short excerpt of this column in support of another local residence, "David Tuttle is now selling 'Story of John Dietz's Life... Being a cripple it is a good job for Dave, and we hope he will meet with success.'" ⁴⁹ This is an example of communal ties demonstrating support – a call for friends and neighbors to support those whom were less fortunate.

⁴⁷ Marple, *The Visitor Who Came to Stay: Legacy of the Hayward Area*, 81.

⁴⁸ The \$1.50 subscription in 1908 would approximate to just over \$35.00 in 2010; interestingly in 2011, an annual subscription to the *Sawyer County Gazette* was \$20 for Sawyer County residents and \$24.00 for out-of-county residents.

⁴⁹ "Local Happenings," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 9, 1908, 1.

Indeed the Gazette also provided important national and international news that the community looked forward to reading. Reports of a tornado that “swept down on the city of Omaha,” cases of small pox in Atlanta (1908) and devastating earthquakes in Mexico (1907) and Italy (1908) all graced the front page of the weekly periodical. News of the Titanic reached Winter in 1912 in a front-page article titled “Steamer Titanic Goes Down to a Deep Watery Grave,” which described the wreck as “the greatest disaster in history.”⁵⁰ New neighbors and friends would speak of events such as these to one another and form common bonds that not only they would maintain for years, but also the succeeding generations.

It was news that put Winter on the map in the early 1900s. Benson described Winter in these times as “a rowdy, rollicking place in its early years, abounding with rumors about John Dietz.”⁵¹ The infamous John Dietz and the Battle of the Cameron Dam brought the community to its first major communal ties battle. Dietz, farmer and attempted real estate salesperson, moved from the Rice Lake area served as employee of the Chippewa Lumber & Boom Company as a watchman of the Price Dam on the Brunet River. He later moved to a plot of land that he purchased on the Thornapple River south of Winter for a reported \$280⁵² – a bargain because of its isolation in the wilderness. Perhaps Dietz’s plot of land was a metaphor for his personality; Benson remembered that people “were panic stricken when he came to town, [with] pistol on hip.”

⁵⁰ “Death and Destruction, *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), March 27, 1913, 1; “Small Pox in Atlanta,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 16, 1908, 1; “City Destroyed by Earthquake,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 18, 1907, 1; “City Destroyed by Earthquake,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 18, 1907, 1; “70,000 Are Killed by the Earthquake in Italy,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), December 31, 1908, 1; “Steamer Titanic Goes to Deep Watery Grave,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter WI), April 18, 1912, 1.

⁵¹ Benson, “Remembering Winter,” n.p.

⁵² Rosholt, *The Battle of Cameron Dam*, 11-13.

Shortly after moving to his new homestead he claimed that he had not been properly paid all due wages from serving as watchman. As disagreements arose between Dietz and the lumber company, Dietz decided to take matters into his own hands and refused to allow the company to drive the logs through his property unless they paid a request 10 cent per thousand feet of logs since he purchased the property. Negotiations were not met, so Dietz served as a watchman of “his” dam with a rifle to enforce his claim.⁵³

Disagreements persisted for several years and the lumber company eventually paid the claim of \$1800 to Dietz, but he was not content. As a result, the company was forced to send its logs down the Flambeau River which was considerably more expensive. As the stalemate continued from 1904 to 1910, the Dietz case made national news. Eventually the lumber company filed a legal complaint but the local sheriff and deputies were unable to apprehend Dietz. When Dietz fired at a town marshal, however, county officials organized a posse in Winter and sent out to restrain Dietz, resulting in the injuries of two of his children and the death of a deputy. Although Dietz was encouraged by the district attorney to give up peacefully and settle his troubles in court, he refused. A battle surged in 1910 in which Dietz was wounded, resulting in his surrender. He was tried by jury, found guilty, and even sentenced to life in prison. Due to popular demands, however, Dietz was eventually pardoned by the Wisconsin Governor Blaine and released after ten years, retiring in Milwaukee with his family.⁵⁴

Dietz was important in not only bringing the community together towards a unified goal (first in supporting his argument, then in supporting the law enforcement who apprehended him) in the early 1900s, but he also came to be representative of the individual against corporations, a

⁵³ Morris, “From White Pines and White Tails: A Social Study of Sawyer County,” 41.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

“victim of an injustice.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, it was stories such as these that encouraged neighbors to gather and form communal ties with each other. Despite the community’s views on his actions during that time, he was later renowned as a hero, especially while the pardoning process was in the works. T-shirts and other apparel were sold and sported throughout the twentieth century, referring to Winter as the “Site of the Battle of the Cameron Dam.” Even the *Gazette* boasted this as its community slogan until the early 2000s, demonstrating the community’s pride even as late as a hundred years after the “battle.”

Sense of Community: Religion, Business, Clubs, and Schools

The need for communal ties continued to grow throughout the formative years of the first part of the twentieth century. Besides information, organizations were crucial in developing relationships. Churches, schools, businesses, and several civic organizations all found their genesis in these years and they all helped the yeoman farmers or townspeople to overcome their obstacles. Between the years of 1908 and 1930 the *Gazette* mentions numerous organizations that formed, excluding of course the organizations (such as the first Winter school) that were established before the town incorporation in 1905 and the newspapers first release in 1908.

The Presbyterian, Catholic, and Lutheran churches all formed within the first twenty years of the century, creating religious communal ties that extended beyond the church boundaries and into the home. Groups such as the Christian Endeavors and Ladies Societies formed in 1908,⁵⁶ as well as Sunday school classes which all helped to facilitate the transition of religion and relationship. These organizations were established to be continuous and perform social functions; while services were typically only held weekly, meetings and fundraisers were

⁵⁵ Rosholt, *The Battle of Cameron Dam*, 8.

⁵⁶ “Local Happenings,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 19, 1908, 1.

held at other times as a means to achieve a common goal, such as for raising funds to build a new church, to hiring a new pastor, or sometimes even to paying the mortgage.

Churches were also a means for isolated farm women to come together and visit with one another. For the first several years after the establishment of the Lutheran church, for example, services would be held at different homes and school houses. Besides raising funds, women also taught school, cooked food, arranged social activities, and maintained the family's involvement in the church.⁵⁷ In a sense, churches were not only intricate to communal ties, but they also served as extensions of the family.⁵⁸

Several other organizations were developed during these first years of Winter as well, organizations that were important to the goals that they achieved, such as the founding of the American Red Cross in the 1910s and the farmers' unions. Still other organizations, such as the baseball team, Winter junior band, and countless picnics, dinners, and festivals were created for recreational purposes. Yet other relationships developed because of a specific unified goal, such as the seeking of electricity, fighting against stopping the rail passenger service, advocating for telephone or rural mail route service, and even construction projects including the development of road building and creation of the controversial Winter Dam on the Chippewa River in the early 1920s.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Kielcheski, Olson, and Sundberg, *Winter, Wisconsin...Happyland*.

⁵⁸ Michelle Van Ark, "Portrait of Stangelville: Life in a Rural Community During the 1930s and the 1940s," *Voyageur* 22, no. 10 (Winter/Spring 2005): 49.

⁵⁹ "Grand Dance," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), June 25, 1919, 3; "Creamery Will Be Erected Here This Coming Summer," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), March 30, 1916, 1; "Group Formed to Oppose Railroad Abandonment," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 3, 1955, 1; "Property Owners Endeavor to Stop River's Pollution," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 8, 1936, 1; "To Erect Big Storage Dam," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 1, 1917, 1; "Local Happenings," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), 1921, 1; "Rural Mail Route Will Start on May 2," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 24, 1921, 1; "Landmark Moved," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 6, 1948, 1; "Celebrate at Barker Lake," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 1, 1920, 3; "Is Urgent Upon Good Roads," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI),

Businesses began to develop, further developing communal ties, eventually even creating business partnerships. One such partnership developed between the local doctor and the Tuckers and formed the community's first drug store. Most of the businesses that Winter ever boasted were established during these formative years, including an auto dealership, the railroad depot, multiple hotels, a free traveling library, Camp Rockne (a summer boys camp on Hunter Lake), hardware stores, rooming houses, a movie theater, the post office, a creamery, black smith shops, saw mills, a potato cooperative, a bank, and saloons.⁶⁰ This rapid development of business parallels the rapid settlement, but it also represents the community's common goal of starting anew, seeking opportunity, and relying on one another for help with this goal. These businesses formed not only to benefit the owner, but also the entire community,⁶¹ such as the creamery which was built by the Edward Hines Farmland Company in order to help the settlers succeed.⁶²

This rapid development also created a demand for more schools, a main reason why some of the few foreign immigrants sought Wisconsin and elsewhere in America.⁶³ Through time, the Winter area witnessed the creation and demise of several schoolhouses. Many of these schools were originally built to only satisfy the needs of only one of two families (such as the McDonald School); others a particular area (such as the Fishtrap School, Crawford School, Jamison School,

June 1, 1916, 1; "Attempt to Start American Red Cross," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 31, 1917, 1; Hunkel, "Happy Centennial, Winter!" n.p.

⁶⁰ Martin, "Winter A True Happyland," n.p.

⁶¹ Van Ark, "Portrait of Stangelville: Life in a Rural Community During the 1930s and the 1940s," 49.

⁶² M.F. Beaudoin, "Michael Beaudoin on Edward Hines Lumber Company," Interview by W.H. Gunner, Park Falls, WI, November 29, 1950, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

⁶³ John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp; Van Ark, "Portrait of Stangelville: Life in a Rural Community During the 1930s and the 1940s," 126.

and Winter's first school, Buckwheat)⁶⁴ and still others as a means to consolidate these smaller schools as transportation became less difficult (Draper School, Radisson School, and Couderay School). Later on in the 1990s, these schools were eventually consolidated into one, main district school at Winter, which still serves the community today.

The functions of these schools, besides the obvious one of education, were many including serving as town halls, meeting places, polling places, churches,⁶⁵ or social community centers.⁶⁶ A school was a place for people to come together, outside of the religious sphere, and offer support to each other – a means to form friendships and relationships, to offer encouragement. The schools were also a cause of tension among the community members as well, however. Fearful of what the repercussions of a closed school house might do to the neighborhood or community caused distress and anxiety to some residents, while simultaneously realizing that it simply was becoming no longer feasible to house only a few students.

Other factors, such as the planning and rebuilding of a school, tended to bring members of the community closer together to achieve common goals. Since the very early formative years, the Winter School has been a symbol of pride to the community. A 1928 Winter School yearbook provides a preface explaining the school's history, having burned down twice, and the students "sincerely hope[ing] our 'W.H.S.' [Winter High School] weathers every test."⁶⁷ Numerous excerpts from the *Sawyer County Gazette* have boasted implications of pride held in the school, such as the note that "during the past few months any person in our village has heard

⁶⁴ Esther Musser, "Winter School District Schools," (essay, manuscript in the possession of the author, n.d.), n.p.

⁶⁵ Kielcheski, Olson, and Sundberg, *Winter, Wisconsin...Happyland*.

⁶⁶ Musser, "Winter School District Schools," n.p.

⁶⁷ "History of Winter," *Winter High School (WHS) Princess Pine Yearbook*, (Winter School District, 1928), n.p.

time after time the expressions of praise made to visitors to our town of the fine high school that is being erected by Winter's citizens," and another from 1922 or "How Our Schools Excel!"⁶⁸

Impact of Warfare

Even warfare had a significant impact on the communal ties in the Winter community. Although the First World War had been in progress for almost three years before America's involvement in 1917, that did not discourage the sons of Winter that sought involvement. John Martin explained that dozens of Winter's young men served in this "war to end all wars." The *Sawyer County Gazette* featured pleas and encouragement to the young men of the area to join the cause. Some 37 local young men served in as Wisconsin's 32nd Division – a number that was "twice its portion considering the ratio supplied by the entire county."⁶⁹ The Division eventually earned fame as the Red Arrow Division.⁷⁰

With the departure of so many of Winter's young men, farm life became even more troublesome than usual, often setting farmers back considerably. This required the community to yet again come together and support the working "single" mother, a term that carries a very different meaning than today, as brothers, sons, and fathers were serving abroad. One mother had to divide her children among different family and friends in order for them to be well taken care of during this difficult time.⁷¹ Winter lost several young men in the cause fighting abroad,⁷² but

⁶⁸ "Rural and Village School Enrollment," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 17, 1921, 1; "How Our Schools Excel!" *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), January 25, 1923, 1.

⁶⁹ "Thirty-Seven Men Have Enlisted from our Town," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 18, 1917, 1.

⁷⁰ Martin, "Winter A True Happyland," n.p.

⁷¹ Kielcheski, Olson, and Sundberg, *Winter, Wisconsin...Happyland*.

Winter's pride remained strong and the community rejoiced upon their return home with an elaborate homecoming in 1919.⁷³ It was a celebration that welcomed them to a place where they would certainly settle down, not simply visit as many of their descendants would in the future.

* * *

In summary, the formation years of Winter from its incorporation in 1905 until the waning years of the 1920s were a period of great progress and development. A community was formed from almost nothing and communal ties developed significantly. It was communal ties that enabled the community and its residence to survive through the formation of businesses, religious sects, schools, community organizations and goals, disagreements and achievements, and even war. Although the population would continue to increase to nearly 1,500 residents in 1940 (nearly a 300 percent increase since 1910)⁷⁴ and many farmers would continue to endure through the 1930s, development would drastically decrease despite the population boom. This was partly because of the oncoming Great Depression, but also because the farmers had realized something crucial to their future survival – farming in Happy Land was a bust.

⁷² Martin, "Winter A True Happyland," n.p.

⁷³ "Homecoming Celebration for Soldiers," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), June 5, 1919, 1.

⁷⁴ Industrial Commission, *The Wisconsin Blue Book 1913*, 89; *Wisconsin Blue Book 1944*, 375.

PART III: THE DEPRESSION – 1930s to 1940s

As the rest of the nation proclaimed headlines of the stock market failure and announced Black Tuesday, Winter remained quiet. The headlines in the *Sawyer County Gazette* that week featured a wedding announcement and high school basketball report; the week after an article was exhibited which featured the death of the world's oldest man (a Chinese man who apparently lived until the ripe age of 252 and survived 23 wives).⁷⁵ In fact, there was no mention of "the crash" in the several months afterward either. Of course, this is not to say that the editor of the periodical, as well as the community, was uninformed or even ignorant. The Great Depression affected Winter, an already poor community in a different sort of way than many others.

Many of the yeoman farmers that pioneered the area through the previous thirty or forty years had, by this time, either given up or remained poor. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture in 1927 reevaluated the land in the cutover area and the results were much less positive than had been years prior, basically describing the soil as not as ideal as had once been believed.⁷⁶ However poor the community, they were rich in another aspect. Although communal ties were probably most important to the development of the Winter community during the formative years, they were also crucial in maintaining the community through the Depression era from the waning years of the 1920s until the 1940s. Without the bonds formed during the community in the formative years, the community may have suffered from the demise of Depression.

Creating Distractions

⁷⁵ "Local Happenings," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 31, 1929, 1; "World's Oldest Man, 252 Lives in China," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 7, 1929, 1.

⁷⁶ Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*, 164.

During the economic troubles of the 1930s, the community found several means to gather and celebrate what they did have – each other. Several community functions were initiated as a means to take the settlers’ minds off the difficulties they were enduring, music being one of the most important as it was relatively inexpensive. The community band, formed in 1920, was more popular than it had ever been before, providing the community with street dances from its Main Street pavilion, including the “Hard Time Dance” in 1933. Similarly a high school band was formed in 1937, perhaps because of the popularity of the street band, and an operetta was sponsored by the students. The Winter Rod and Gun Club even sponsored an orchestra visit. The community also provided free street shows on Saturday night, courtesy of the Winter businesses. Caroline Benson remembered these being joyous occasions that the entire community could partake in:

“...logs [were] put out on the ground of a vacant lot for seating, and put up an outdoor screen, under the stars. The free show was well attended, and the fragrance of popping corn from Tucker's corner attracted many a young man and his date. Records were played until it got dark enough for the show, and the whole town assumed a festive atmosphere.”⁷⁷

When the weather became unsuitable, the shows would resume at the school or town hall. Of course, there was also the Grand Theater in Hayward where the fortunate ones might catch a glimpse of the popular Disney’s *Pinocchio*, advertised in the *Sawyer County Gazette*. The community even boasted a local amateur radio station in the 1930s.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Benson, “Remembering Winter,” n.p.

⁷⁸ “Landmark Moved,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 6, 1948, 1; “Hard Time Dance,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 16, 1933, 1; “School Band to Form,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 15, 1937, 1; “School Operetta Friday, May 15,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 7, 1936, 1; “Winter Rod & Club to Sponsor Dance Here,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 16, 1936, 1; “Local Happenings,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), September 4, 1936, 1; “Local Happenings,” *Sawyer County Gazette*, (Winter, WI), October 14, 1943, 1; “Local Happenings,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 11, 1940, 1.

The community also sponsored other events to gather and come together. The Winter Street Fair, the National Pancake Eating Contest (in 1941 Bill Copple beat the record after eating 57 pancakes), the July Jubilee, and even a traveling free library⁷⁹ were all designed to bring the community together and provide a sense of relief during the depths of the Depression. Many of these activities were later stopped to focus on the distraction that World War II created.⁸⁰

The Depression probably affected children in the area the least. Laura Hunkel remembers that children never had time to be bored. They were often contributing to the betterment of the family by helping with chores, or they were attending school.⁸¹ Of course, they did have the occasional excitement. Benson recalls, as a child, one particular event involving renowned Chicago gangster Joe Saltis, who owned the Barker Lake Resort just outside of town. Saltis sent a truck to town to pick up as many children as it would hold and brought them back to the resort where he provided them with a silent movie showing, forming ties not only among young children, but also between the part-time resident and the permanent resident.⁸² Ice skating was another favorite pastime of children in the area.⁸³

Civic organizations were an important part of life during the Depression as well. The *Sawyer County Gazette* mentions several of these organizations and their various events or fundraisers, including the Good Cheer Club, the new chapter of the American Red Cross, the Cemetery Association, Masons, Winter Civic Club, Resort Owners Association, a sewing club,

⁷⁹ "Local Happenings," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), June 25, 1942, 1; "Local Happenings," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), June 8, 1939, 1.

⁸⁰ "Nation's Birthday Quietly Spent By Our Area's People," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI) July 8, 1944, 1.

⁸¹ Hunkel, "Happy Centennial, Winter!" n.p.

⁸² Benson, "Remembering Winter," n.p.

⁸³ "Local Happenings," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), December 28, 1939, 1.

and several sports teams (including volleyball and badminton). All of these organizations united for some sort of goal – long-term or short-term – such as the Resort Owners Association’s plans for bringing more tourism to Winter, or the American Red Cross’s obligation to support efforts during World War II. Organizations like these and their corresponding activities brought together individuals of common interest to strengthen communal ties.

Perhaps one of the most important changes Winter encountered during the Depression, one that would see lasting implications until even now, was the reintroduction of the tavern to the area in the 1930s. In 1933 Sawyer County voted to repeal the eighteenth amendment by nearly 3 to 1 (Wisconsin overall vote was approximately 5 to 1), and taverns, as well as alcohol, would resume in the Winter community since the town voted “dry” 16 years earlier in the spring election of 1917⁸⁴ (a demonstration of the community’s support earlier Prohibition). Interestingly, Joe Saltis (Barker Lake) and Al Capone (Blueberry Lake), bootleggers during the Prohibition, both had seasonal residences in the Winter School District in southern Sawyer County during this time. The tavern became another place for working men (and later women) to bond; drinking was a pastime that was constrained by neither time nor place, as other activities usually had been with scheduled meetings, events, and other functions.

While the importance of the local newspaper remained, the content of the *Sawyer County Gazette* changed. The front-page news progressed largely from international and national relations to a more narrow focus of the community, demonstrating the internal growth of the community. The Depression impacted the tone of the newspaper, however, boasting much less about what Winter “could be” and the “endless possibilities” that were so common in the formative years, to the reality of the community – a struggle. One article, “Let Us Be Mindful of

⁸⁴ “County Returns a Heavy ‘Wet’ Poll,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 6, 1933, 1; “Hats of to Sawyer County – Second Dry One in the State of Wisconsin,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 5, 1917, 1.

Obligations to Our Home Community,” essentially disdained those who were not involved in the community and reminded people not to speak poorly of their neighborhoods.⁸⁵ It reflected the pessimistic aspect of the community. Indeed, it was not until America’s involvement in World War II that the newspaper’s tone would revert back to the optimism that was prominent before the Depression. Perhaps this was a response to the farmer’s frustration, or to the reverberating effects the Depression had – not only the community but also the nation.

Effects of the Depression

Of course, Winter did suffer during this period. Schools in particular found the Depression particularly challenging. The school district was comprised of several different townships as it encompassed such a large area. This made it difficult for people to agree on which schools to close because they were no longer financially feasible – each community wanted their school to remain open. Consolidation tended to unite the broader community together, but also caused disagreements within the smaller communities.

The county superintendent believed that it was no longer practical to maintain many of the small schools as teachers were resigning throughout the county to join the military during wartime and extended transportation was becoming more common. Furthermore, more typical of Wisconsin’s poorer counties, school consolidation was not well-received. Educators throughout the state sought to reform school as a means to bridge the educational gaps between the urban and rural districts in order to create similar educational and extracurricular experiences.⁸⁶ In order for this to successfully become a reality, smaller schoolhouses needed to be consolidated, which threatened many neighborhoods’ pride.

⁸⁵ “Let Us Be Mindful of Obligations to Our Home Community,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 21, 1932, 1.

⁸⁶ Paul W. Glad, *The History of Wisconsin: War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940, Volume 5* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 258-260.

Bishop Bridge School, for example (also referred to as Lessard or Crawford), located just outside of the village, was closed and merged with the neighboring Ojibwa School. In 1944, Couderay, Radisson, and Barber Lake schools were all required to send their high school students to the larger, more centrally located, Winter High School; Thornapple, Bass Lake, Flambeau, and Fishtrap schools were all shut down and all the students were bused to Winter or Barber Lake. Buckwheat School was closed in late 1929; Jamison, Winter's first school, was closed in 1941 due to a fire caused by lightning, resulting in the students being transported to Winter.⁸⁷ Meadowbrook and Riverside schools were closed in 1946,⁸⁸ probably as an after-effect of the Depression but also because of transportation becoming more adequate.

The students of these closed schools were assimilated into other schools, which in turn developed new friendships and relationships. The closings of these schools caused difficulties for those that had depended on them, such as the families and students. The teachers often found themselves moving away from Winter in search for new opportunities.

Schools were not the only entities to suffer during these difficult times. The Depression also saw the consolidation of townships in Winter. The township of Fishtrap Lake, for example, merged into the Winter township. It dissolved in 1936, only fourteen years after established because it proved too difficult to raise taxes as the federal government purchased large portions of the township (resulted in part of what is now the Chequamegon National Forest).⁸⁹ The residents of Fishtrap Lake area had a much different attitude during this time than they did

⁸⁷ "Bring Students in Couderay Area to Winter, New Plan," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), August 24, 1944, 1; "Buckwheat School to Close," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 3, 1929, 1; "Lightning Causes Total Destruction of Jamison School," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 17, 1941, 1.

⁸⁸ Musser, "Winter School District Schools," n.p.

⁸⁹ "Fishtrap Voters Favor Dissolution," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 9, 1936, 1; The 1930 U.S. Census reported only 136 residents in the Fishtrap township.

thirteen years prior, when they enthusiastically brought their local news to be published by Thomas Noyes of the *Sawyer County Gazette*. The Fishtrap neighborhood endured although the formal township did not, however, and still contributes to the Winter community largely through its recreational resources. The resulting merger created the largest township (in terms of square miles) in Wisconsin, a title which it still boasts today.⁹⁰

Of course, businesses suffered as well. Banks in southern Sawyer County were consolidated in 1933, to be headquartered in Winter. The Commissioner of Banking and acting Wisconsin Governor first issued a mandatory fourteen-day closure, or “holiday,” because of “Old Man Depression.” Later that year it was declared that only one bank was needed in the Sawyer County area near the Park Falls line, resulting in the closure of the Couderay State Bank and State Bank of Radisson, with the banks to be consolidated at Winter as the Chippewa Valley Bank.⁹¹

The Loretta Fair Store also found it too difficult to endure during the Depression and into wartime as merchandise became unavailable and business grew slower.⁹² President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s CCC camps, which provided jobs (including the construction of Winter’s original ranger station)⁹³ to several who would have otherwise suffered, also began to close.⁹⁴ It seemed

⁹⁰ Town of Winter, “Official Website for the Town of Winter, Sawyer County, Wisconsin,” <http://www.townofwinter.com/> (accessed 30 November, 2010).

⁹¹ Bank Holiday Halts Nation’s Business; Edict by Acting Governor O’Malley Temporarily Closing State Institutions,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI) March 9, 1933, 1; “Consolidation of Three Banks to Soon Be A Reality,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 25, 1933, 1; Today a branch of the Chippewa Valley Bank is in Radisson.

⁹² “Loretta Fair Store Will Soon Go Out of Business,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 8, 1942, 1.

⁹³ Martin, “Winter A True Happyland,” n.p.

⁹⁴ “Several CCC Units Reported to Close,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), March 19, 1936, 1.

the depression would never end – businesses failing, townships dissolving, schools consolidating, jobs being lost. Churches probably suffered the least, but not without the help of the pastor and the respective congregations. Dinners and meager fundraisers were held (sometimes even to pay the mortgage), and also benefits, in order to provide what little they could for their churches congregations.⁹⁵

Still, times were tight for these groups as well as the individual and their families. Tensions rose, but overall the community members remained relatively harmonious with one another – perhaps a requirement of the individuals during these difficult times. Eventually the community began to drift apart, however. This was partly because of survival, but also because they grew weary of struggle. They needed help – something to reunite them with a common goal or bond – and it appeared that this help would come in the form of war.

World War II: Reuniting the Community

Winter entered the Second World War just as so many other small communities had across the country. Some residents were drafted, others enlisted – all enthusiastically supported the war. Headlines from the *Sawyer County Gazette* proclaimed “Veteran and Son Enrolled in Navy,” which manifested the “...patriotic spirit of father and son...”⁹⁶ Another announced “Five Allen Sons Now In Service,” indicating the importance of the war not only to the soldiers, but to the family and community as well. Indeed, the *Gazette* began to regain the optimistic tone that had been so prevalent during the formative years. The war excited (and united) the community, just as it had done during the First World War. Besides the resulting stimulus, the war took their minds off of their struggles and the hard times that they were enduring. Some young soldiers

⁹⁵ Kielcheski, Olson, and Sundberg, *Winter, Wisconsin...Happyland*.

⁹⁶ “Veteran and Son Enrolled In Navy,” *Sawyer County Gazette*, (Winter, WI), July 30, 1942, 1.

never found their way back to Winter, choosing to pursue greater opportunity in the city. Winter's population dropped from over 1,400 residents to slightly over 1,100 residents from 1940 to 1950.⁹⁷

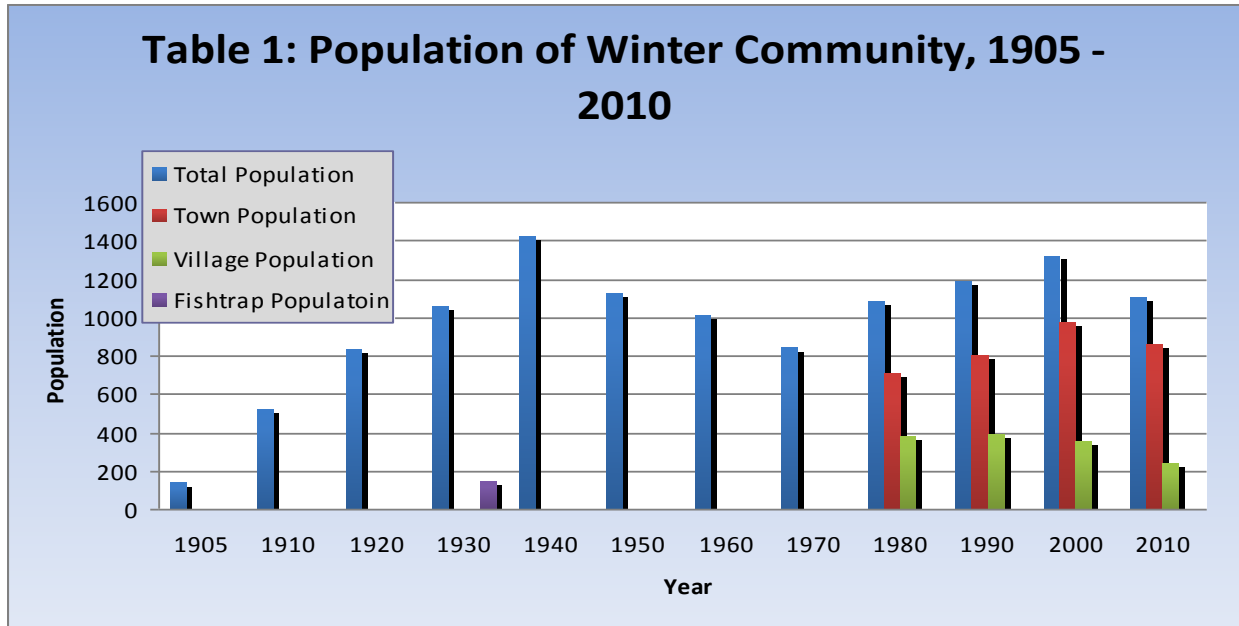


Table 1: Winter Population Trends: 1905 to 2010. Population information compiled from United States Census Bureau.

Winter, having originally been formed as a farming town, had seen its climax. In 1940 Sawyer County peaked at approximately 1,291 farms with a population of 11,540 – in 1950 the Census indicated 1,016 farms and 10,323 residents – a decrease of approximately 22 percent of the total farms and approximately 11 percent of the total population.⁹⁸ This decrease of population would remain steady to Winter until sometime in the 1970s (and again decline

⁹⁷ Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library, *The Wisconsin Blue Book 1944* (Madison: State of Wisconsin, 1944), 375; *Wisconsin Blue Book 1962*, 670.

⁹⁸ University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," (accessed 1 April, 2011).

according to the 2010 census) as seen in Table 1.⁹⁹ Opportunity called many: farmers abandoned their farms and sought the city; young soldiers chose not to return after their call to duty; and children of the yeoman farmers sought further education or a better life in the city. Such was the case with some teachers at Winter as they were called to war and left Winter behind.

* * *

Once again the community found itself struggling, and this time communal ties could provide little more than encouragement or comforting words. Although lumber and farming were both short-lived, the people still managed to endure through the Depression. Now the community was faced with another dilemma. This dilemma came in the form of a question, similar to that towards the end of the formative years of the early part of the century... Now what? In order for the community to continue its existence, a new plan had to be created. The community needed to focus on its strengths and resources and capitalize on them. The next two decades would be a period of reexamination in order to clearly understand its purpose in the greater society.

⁹⁹Industrial Commission, *The Wisconsin Blue Book 1913* (Madison: Democrat Printing Co., State Printer: 1913), 89; *The Wisconsin Blue Book 1921*, 481; *Wisconsin Blue Book 1944*, 375; *Wisconsin Blue Book 1962*, 670; *Wisconsin Blue Book 1981-1982*, 761; *Wisconsin Blue Book 2001-2002*, 763; U.S. Bureau of the Census, "American Fact Finder, 2010," <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?ref=geo&refresh=t#none> (accessed April 1, 2011).

PART IV: A NEW DIRECTION – 1950s to 1960s

After realizing that the lumber resource was indeed not an endless supply and that farming was not as ideal in Sawyer County as once promised, the Winter community progressed through the Great Depression and sought new prospects within the area. With the reforestation efforts of and the federal establishment of the Chequamegon National Forest in 1933,¹⁰⁰ as well as the abundance of area lakes, the community became increasingly interested in moving towards tourism as a means for survival. The Resort Owners Association was formed in response to this development in 1938,¹⁰¹ which advocated for tourism in southern Sawyer County and the Winter community. Indeed, the *New York Times* described the Chequamegon as the “poor man’s playground...deep in the heart of the Wisconsin cutover-over wilds.”¹⁰² This would be a direction that the community would remain focused on increasingly through the years until even today.

This new direction would eventually impact the community in several different ways. With the lumber industry waning and the personal automobile becoming a more prevalent commodity, the creation and development of better roads began to take shape. Irma Biermann recalls when her parents purchased a 150-acre resort on the Flambeau River in 1947 for around \$20,000.¹⁰³ At the time of her family’s purchase, Big Bear Resort, located just south of Winter, had no electricity or telephone service and the closest mail service was over eight miles away. This was exactly what many visitors from the other areas were looking for, some even driving as

¹⁰⁰ Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*, 170.

¹⁰¹ “Resort Owners of Area are Preparing to Organize,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 14, 1938, 1.

¹⁰² Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940*, 170.

¹⁰³ Nearly \$200,000 in 2010.

far away as from Chicago: a place where they could escape the hectic life of the city. Although many of the roads still sometimes remained difficult to travel, such as the county road that Big Bear Resort was found on, they were progressing.¹⁰⁴

Indeed the *Sawyer County Gazette* would attest to several different resort-property real estate transactions, demonstrating the new appreciation for Winter's isolation and resources. With the establishment of the resorts, more businesses would be developed, including restaurants and taverns, to accommodate the community members and their visitors, but the tourists as well. Perhaps a visit to a resort would even lead to the eventual purchase of a part-time home in the Winter area, resulting in year-round customers for business owners.

Building

The 1950s and 1960s, quiet as they may have been, was a time of happiness and progress for the community. It was a time of automobiles, movies, bowling and Little League, and probably most important, building. The school was again remodeled and expanded, a permanent library was established, a village sewer system was developed, the public park was created, airports were placed, and several businesses were added to the community. An article published in 1955 by the *Sawyer County Gazette* boasted that at the time the town had "Some 25 businesses [that] hug Main st." The same article further mentions the "25 man Volunteer Fire Department," the audio theater, and even the importance of the logging industry. It hints that the chief industry at this time was lumbering.¹⁰⁵ John Martin explained that the 1950s and 1960s still

¹⁰⁴ Irma Biermann, Interview by author, Winter, WI. June 23, 2005. * Biermann remembered her family often having to use their resort tractor to pull resort guests from the inclement road conditions during her family's ownership of the resort, attesting to the poor roadway developments.

¹⁰⁵ "P.O. Dedicated on Main Street," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), August 7, 1958, 1; "State Library Consultant Visits Winter," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), January 30, 1958, 1; "Grand Opening at Winter Coop Starts on Friday," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 29, 1951, 1; "Many School Improvements," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), September 8, 1955, 1; "Winter In..." *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 24, 1955, 3.

saw some sawmills in operation, including the Paul Petit Mill, which was “still sawing nearly year around and employing men at his mill, and provided work for several crews in the woods.”¹⁰⁶ The 1950s and 1960s was a time of progress for the community, which was second only to the progress of the earlier formative years. Winter was being built not only for the influx of tourists, but also for the baby-boomer generation.

Building progressed not only in terms of physical space, but also in terms of relationship formation. It is during this time that several organizations would develop that would prove vital to the community not only because of the functions they provided, but also the relationships they formed. The Winter Volunteer Fire Department (developed in the late 1940s), for example, would not only provide safety and protection for the community, they would host important social functions such as Christmas parties and visits from Santa Claus,¹⁰⁷ demonstrating how an organization with a goal of safety and protection simultaneously required the development of communal ties.

The Winter fourth of July festivities as well as the National Pancake Contest were resumed after the wartime interruption, becoming bigger than ever – even featuring cameo visits from Aunt Jemima herself. A Boy Scout troop was also organized in the community during this time, demonstrating the importance of youth relationships as well.¹⁰⁸ The Winter Cooperative was also developed, creating a community-owned and operated business that was based on communal ties. The Winter Junior Chamber of Commerce, a predecessor of the present-day

¹⁰⁶ Martin, “Winter A True Happyland,” n.p.

¹⁰⁷ “Fireman’s Kiddie Party is Tonight,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), December 22, 1948, 1.

¹⁰⁸ “Aunt Jemima Will Be Here for Pancake Contest,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 6, 1952, 1; “Boy Scout Troop Organized Here, Seek More Scouts,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 29, 1959, 1.

Winter Area Chamber of Commerce, was also formed during this time to unite businesses within the community to bring more business back to the area.¹⁰⁹ The Draper-Loretta (D & L) Homemakers formed during 1960 for the sheer purpose of “giving back” to the community that was “so dear to them,”¹¹⁰ demonstrating that the need to form and maintain communal ties remained among women as well as men during this time.

As Winter became more tourist savvy, the roads became increasingly suitable for travelers and the increased number of automobiles. It was only a matter of time, therefore, before the railroad became neglected. In 1965, after nearly sixty years in existence, the railroad was abandoned and stripped, despite the community protests. It was no longer necessary for mail service, passenger service, or even freight – large trucks and automobiles had replaced these needs. The abandonment of the railroad would mean more attention would be needed for the roadways, which were now the life-giving arteries for the community. To Winter, which served as an evacuation area during the Cold War for cities such as Milwaukee and Chicago, adequate roadways were important in several different aspects.¹¹¹

Probably one of the most important building events in these decades was the development of the Price Dam and the resulting creation of Lake Winter. The dam had been under scrutiny since as early as 1934 but was apparently dropped because of inadequate funding. It was not until 1960 that matching funds became available from the state and county, and after

¹⁰⁹ “Grand Opening at Winter Coop Starts on Friday,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), November 29, 1951, 1; “First Annual JCC Banquet Will Be Held at Barker Lake Resort June 4,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 25, 1950, 1.

¹¹⁰ Tienne Linden and Janet Topp, “D&L Homemakers (Draper & Loretta)” (essay, manuscript in possession of the author, 2005), n.p.

¹¹¹ “C&NW To Close Winter Depot Friday, July 30,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI) July 29, 1965, 1. Hunkel, “Happy Centennial, Winter!” n.p.

much litigation the dam was finally voted in favor of and dedicated in 1967.¹¹² The lake created by the dam had matured by 1970 and since then has proved a vital economic staple to the area, attracting tourists and part-time residents to the area, as well as providing recreation for local residents.¹¹³

* * *

Winter was open and ready for business. The community offered attractions and businesses, adequate roadways, modern luxuries such as waterworks and electricity, schools and churches, and pristine forest and water ways. The building during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s was certain to pay off. What the community did not know, however, was exactly how long it would be before business was ready for Winter. Unsure of their future, the residents of the community did understand that they now had a common goal; they realized what their place would be in the greater society and they embraced this new, defined path in the coming decades.

¹¹² "Winter Voters Levy \$15,000 for New Brunet Dam," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI) November 15, 1963, 1.

¹¹³ Theresa Denenny, "The Making of Lake Winter: An Interview with Adrian Pearson," *Winter Area Vacationland News* (c. 1987), n.p.

PART V: A DEFINED PATH – 1970s & BEYOND

If the 1950s and 1960s can be compared to the formative years of the early twentieth century because of the increased growth and development, then the 1970s onward can be compared to the less-progressive years of the Depression era. This was (and remains still today) a period of optimism towards the community, consolidation, disagreements and conflicts, and often desertion within the community. Distractions during this time were not as easily accessible within the community as they had been during the Depression era as the automobile now required individuals to travel outside of the community to seek them. Despite the world “becoming smaller” through media and other communications technology, the need to form and maintain communal ties bonds remained strong throughout this period and even until today.

It seems that the community barely had time to appreciate the newly formed Lake Winter in 1970 as a new conflict arose. Winter had become divided; however, it was only a matter of time. The village people and the township sought separation. The idea of separation within municipalities was not new or even unfamiliar. Some residents sought separation as early as the late 1950s and Radisson had undergone a similar process nearly twenty years prior. Undoubtedly the main reason for the schism was due to tax purposes, as village residents felt they should not be taxed the same as town residents.¹¹⁴ In 1973 the people of the proposed village of Winter voted 116 to 31 in favor of incorporating a new village¹¹⁵ – a remarkable turnout as the estimated population of the village in 1975 was only 317.¹¹⁶ Once the separation was finalized and the

¹¹⁴ A former town municipality employee remembers that the installation and taxation of village street lights may have even initially spurred the schism.

¹¹⁵ “116 Votes Favor Incorporation of Village of Winter,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), August 16, 1973, 1.

¹¹⁶ *Wisconsin Blue Book 1981-1982*, 761.

Village of Winter was chartered, however, disagreements did not cease. Although not constant, disagreements would last well into the twenty-first century over such things as the shared public library and fire department.

Despite these disagreements, the community did realize the importance tourism would have on the community and recognized the need for cooperation – a testament to the building projects in the decades prior. The abandonment of the railroad created a new state park, the Tuscobia State Trail, symbolizing the community’s almost abrupt change in direction from the industry of the Omaha Line to the recreation of the Tuscobia State Trail in 1968. In the Winter Lakes Region advertisement pamphlet, the large letters of front-page headline boasted: “The Perfect Vacation Area! Spend Your Summer in Winter.” The article explained that Winter was a place where every member of the family can enjoy a vacation, a place where “[while all] comforts of civilization are available you will find it still the beautiful wilderness country of yesteryear.” Another article in the same pamphlet, “Winter – Where the Farming Ends and The Fishing Begins,” illustrates that the community had indeed changed its focus.¹¹⁷ The land was still their prerogative; however it was to be used for recreation rather than agriculture.

Pamphlets such as this and so many others throughout the 1980s portrayed the community at its finest and in its best light. One pamphlet, for example, explains that “This booklet was achieved through the cooperation and generosity of so many WONDERFUL local people. It’s the kind of spirit you’ll find when you come to the Winter area...”¹¹⁸ The same pamphlet portrayed the Village of Winter as a “quiet, uncomplicated community at the heart of

¹¹⁷ “The Perfect Vacation Area! Spend Your Summer in Winter,” *The Winter Lakes Region* (n.d.), 1.

¹¹⁸ “Welcome to Winter Country including Loretta, Draper, Ojibwa and Winter, Wisconsin... Where it’s at!! *Northern Wisconsin’s Winter Vacationland News: A Journal of Year Around “Winter” Activity* (1985), 3.

this vacation country.”¹¹⁹ These messages demonstrated the community’s new direction towards tourism. Citizens realized, however, that they must unite and work together in order to achieve long-term goals, which is exactly what these pamphlets and other brochures represent through the combined efforts of several individuals and businesses.

The front pages of the *Sawyer County Gazette* have been littered with articles involving hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling since the 1970s. Featured articles boasted headlines such as “Many Snowmobiles Use Trails in Our Community,” “Petit’s Rustic Inn Registers Muskie 200, Lake Winter,” and “Several Large Bear Killed in the Area This Weekend,” all proclaiming that the Winter community was ideal for a variety of recreational purposes. Indeed, another featured article explained a “Tourism Evaluation” to the readers in 1982, with research conducted by Sawyer County Recreation Extension Resource Agent Robert H. Kinney. The report explained where tourists were coming from (the largest group came from Illinois, 55 percent of total visitors), as well as the activities that the people desired (fishing was ranked first, 77 percent, followed by “resting & relaxing” at 69 percent).¹²⁰ Today various articles featuring activities of the recreational director Winter Area Chamber of Commerce are still present, as hunting and fishing reports, snowmobile trail conditions, and even fall color tours are still published, emphasizing the importance of Winter’s new defined path.

¹¹⁹ “The Village of Winter,” *Northern Wisconsin’s Winter Vacationland News: A Journal of Year Around “Winter” Activity* (1985), 12.

¹²⁰ “Many Snowmobiles Use Trail in Our Community,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), December 1, 1971, 1; “Petit’s Rustic Inn Registers Muskie 200, Lake Winter,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 6, 1972, 1; “Tourism Evaluation,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), December 30, 1982, 1; “Several Large Bear Killed in the Area This Weekend,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), September 16, 1971, 1.

Twenty-five years later into 2010 these pamphlets have remained quite similar, although focusing less on the community members' hospitality and more on the abundance of natural resources. The *2010 Winter Area Chamber of Commerce Visitor Guide* boasted Winter as being the "...Heart of the Tuscobia Trail" and "...Gateway to the Chippewa Flowage."¹²¹ Similarly the new pamphlet does demonstrate a sense of community pride, although somewhat different than the pamphlets published in the 1980s. A historical narrative of the "battle" at Cameron Dam is retold, by now a legacy of Winter, and "Winter's Hometown Hero" is portrayed – a Winter native and astronaut Jeffrey Williams, proclaiming to the world what the community should be remembered for.

Jeffrey Williams: Community Role Model

Williams, a 1976 Winter High School graduate, has been lauded throughout the community and even the greater area in general. A retired army colonel, he served as flight engineer and lead space walker for STS-101 Atlantis in 2000, the third Shuttle mission devoted to International Space Station (ISS) construction.¹²² He made the trip to space three times, with nearly 200 hours logged in space. Williams has served not only as a role model and inspirer to the community, but he also helped to reestablish communal ties through pride and accomplishment - students and adults gather alike to hear his talks or to work on a project inspired by him. The community has held parades, devoted school days to him, and briefly even considered renaming the school after him.

¹²¹ Winter Area Chamber of Commerce, "Winter's Hometown Hero," *Winter 2010 Visitor Guide* (Tomahawk, WI: Assured Publishing, 2010), H.

¹²² National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), "Biographical Data: Jeffrey N. Williams (Colonel, USA, RET.) NASA Astronaut," <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/williamsj.html> (accessed 14 March, 2011).

Looking to the Past

It is also during these decades that the community members seemed to develop a greater appreciation for their own history. Perhaps this was in response to the passing of many first-generation pioneers whose stories and lives the area residents were inspired by, or maybe they wished to remember the difficulties they encountered shaping the land. Still, maybe this appreciation developed from the interest of younger residents, desiring to learn more about their hometown community. Regardless, the community attempted to remember its history – a reminder of the strong communal ties that Winter was formed with.

There was at least some interest in the local history before this period, however. The “Yesteryears” began in 1949 in the *Sawyer County Gazette* as a means to briefly summarize and retell the local history of the past, becoming a favorite segment among many subscribers even today. Subscribers still inquire about some of their favorite stories, such as the amazing true tale of the “snow baby,” who was “born of unusual circumstances” first published in 1941 (see Appendix B). The *Gazette* also featured a front-page article regarding a historical marker that was to be constructed in the county, remembering Sawyer County’s first resident, Charles Belille near the Radisson area in 1954, whom Phyllis Baugh describes in detail in her work, *Of Days Gone By: A Brief History of Southern Sawyer County*.¹²³ Several past stories from the *Gazette* reemerged to remind citizens of major events that happened in the community through the years, such as one article, “Big Fire 10 Years Ago,” recalling a devastating 1932 fire that was only contained through the work of the forest protection organization and the “diligent work of numerous local citizens,” connecting the hard work and cooperation of residents earlier with the

¹²³ Phyllis B. Baugh, *Of Days Gone By: A Brief History of Southern Sawyer County* (Minneapolis: Modern Print, 1985).

“now.” Sometimes even buildings were dear to the community, as was the case with the Winter band stand. In 1948, after approximately twenty-five years, the band stand located on Main Street was relocated to the newly developed park in Winter, to serve from then on as a concession stand.¹²⁴

Further interest was developed during the decades of the 1970s and beyond. Various clubs, school alumnus, and families all began to hold organization “birthdays” and reunions more regularly. Winter remembered its Diamond Jubilee in 1980 as well as the Centennial in 2005 (see Appendix C), both events that rekindled memories for the later generations of the pioneers. The park in Winter was renamed only a few years after the death of one of Winter’s most renowned citizens, Dr. “Doc” H.A. Smith, and a road leading to the historic site of John Dietz and the “Battle of the Cameron Dam” (explained in Part II) was also constructed, remembering some of the sacrifices of some pioneers. Indeed historic research and publications became more prevalent as well during this time, especially retelling the “Battle of the Cameron Dam” (as late as 2010) but also county history in general.¹²⁵ Interest in local history has been further demonstrated in the formation of a local historical society, the Happy Land Historical

¹²⁴ “Yesteryears,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), August 4, 1929, 1; “Mother and Infant Son Return Home, Gazette Told News,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 13, 1941, 1; “Historical Marker to Be Dedicated Sunday, Radisson,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), September 14, 1954, 1; “Big Fire 10 Years Ago,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 16, 1942, 1; “Landmark Moved,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 6, 1948, 1; The band stand is still used as a concession stand to this day, especially during the July Jubilee festivities.

¹²⁵ “WHS Class of ’33 Holds Reunion at Ojibwa Club,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 5, 1972, 1; “Camp Wehakee To Celebrate Fiftieth Birthday,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), August 2, 1973, 1; “Cameron Dam Road Will Provide Access to Historic Location,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 17, 1974, 1; “Winter Village Park Re-Named,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), April 27, 1978; Winter Area Chamber of Commerce, “Winter’s Hometown Hero,” H; “Sawyer County History Being Written By Swift,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 6, 1947, 1.

Society, formed in the early 2000s, and reconstruction of the Winter Depot that was closed in 1968 to serve as a tourist information center which is in the works of raising funds now.

Continuing Traditions in the School

Continuing the tradition since the formative years, the community has demonstrated great pride in its school. The district underwent even more consolidation during this time period, eventually closing all but one school in the district. The last closure was in Radisson in the late 1990s. The school was again remodeled and rebuilt in 1997, after a series of referendums, to adjust to both the changing needs of the community and the final influx of students from Radisson. Winter School has hosted numerous community events, government hearings, and, of course, sporting events. After years of interest, the community formed a football team in 2006 – a project that has been attempted since as early as at least the 1960s¹²⁶ – which has helped to further pride not only within the school, but also form new relationships as community members build upon a popular common interest among players, parents, and spectators.

This is not to say the school had not faced its share of difficulties. In the early 1970s, for example, the teachers formed a strike operation when negotiations were failed to be met between the union representative seeking pay increases in excess of \$1,000¹²⁷ for each of the 36 teachers from the school board representative. After 12 days of strike, the teachers resumed work after a \$300¹²⁸ pension contribution was granted to each teacher.¹²⁹ This demonstrates the importance of

¹²⁶ “Administrator Gives Information on Football Costs,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI) January 4, 1968, 1.

¹²⁷ This figure approximates nearly \$5,000 in 2010.

¹²⁸ This figure approximates nearly \$1,500 today.

¹²⁹ “Negotiations Fail, Teachers Strike, No School Here,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 4, 1973, 1; “Winter Schools Open Friday, Strike Ends,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 24, 1973, 1.

communal ties not only among organizations and individuals, but also among those in the workplace.

The Changing Face of Organizations

Although many organizations that were formed in the formative years of the early twentieth century have dissolved, it is this same spirit that encouraged the formation of new organizations during the decades of the 1970s and beyond. Several organizations were formed with a variety of different reasons or goals. The Winter And Draper–Loretta Area (WALDO) organization formed as an attempt to improve the community, encouraging businesses and people to settle in the area as well as to provide for those already in the area. The organization built and funded the senior citizen center in 1970, raised and donated money to the Heart Association in 1975, and sponsored the Winter July Jubilee, among other activities. Indeed, members of WALDO considered themselves to be a group that worked “very hard – [who] do not know the meaning of defeat,” emphasizing their devotion to the community, perhaps stemming from the “Eager Beaver” group that developed from the formative years, much with the same intentions.¹³⁰ This organization, along with the Junior Chamber of Commerce, or Jaycees, led to the formation of today’s Winter Area Chamber of Commerce, which has many of the same principles of improving and providing for the community.

Other organizations also formed with similar intentions as WALDO. The Winter Lions and Lioness Clubs, chartered in 1975 and 1982 respectively, were open to anybody “willing to contribute their efforts to community activities.” The organizations have sponsored (and continue to sponsor) the Winter July Jubilee, raised funds for the Winter High School auditorium,

¹³⁰ “WALDO Donates to Heart Fund,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), March 27, 1975, 1; “WALDO Ass’n Gives Report on Senior Citizens,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 25, 1973, 1; “WALDO Group To Meet Monday, Elect Officers,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), January 15, 1970, 1; “New Colony of Beavers,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), July 27, 1910, 1.

sponsored vision testing, and raised money or volunteered for other community events.¹³¹ The Winter Huskies Snowmobile Club was developed to unite members of the community to work with the county to develop and enhance snowmobile trails in the area, as well as to share a common interest. The Lake Winter Musky Club was also created as a means to “propagate the musky population of Lake Winter,” an organization that would strengthen community members' similar interest while also encouraging tourism¹³² (now the Winter Lake Alliance). Both of these organizations are still active today, demonstrating both the community's continued interest in these activities and the importance that tourism still has in the community

* * *

Since the 1970s, the Winter community has evolved with much of the same modernity as the rest of the nation. The community has been in a long process of transitioning from lumber and industry, to agriculture, and finally to the present focus of recreation and tourism. It has been a time of the “survival of the fittest.” The businesses, organizations, and even the school during this time have worked hard to succeed and maintain their existences. Although the most recent U.S. Census indicates a decline in the population,¹³³ the community moves forward.

This decline can be attributed to several means. Perhaps residents are moving to larger cities in search of better opportunities as they did during the Depression; maybe the demand for

¹³¹ “Plan for Organizing Lions Club in Winter Area, Monday Feb. 10,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 6, 1975, 1; “Area Lioness Club Chartered,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 6, 1982, 1; “Winter Lions Club to Meet at Big Bear Lodge,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), October 23, 1975, 1; “Lions Roar an Invitation to Glaucoma and Vision Testing,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), June 15, 1978, 1.

¹³² “Winter Huskies Plan a Benefit Dance at Wannigan,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), May 13, 1971, 1; “Organize Lake Winter Musky Club Wednesday,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), September 28, 1972, 1.

¹³³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010 (accessed April 1, 2011).

post-secondary education is encouraging students to settle elsewhere. Property-owning part-time residents may also contribute to this phenomenon; they may be increasingly purchasing properties in southern Sawyer County and living in the area only part of the year, claiming their permanent residence elsewhere. Besides supporting the community through property taxes and business support, these residents have also become active members of the community. They participate in many of the organizations the community boasts, bring friends and family members to the area that might also make a return visit or even purchase property, and sometimes they even eventually retire in the area. Regardless of the population, with the support from the community (permanent residents and seasonal) and surrounding communities, Winter has managed to survive during this difficult period through the relationships that have been formed.

CONCLUSION

Since its founding in the early twentieth century, the Winter community's survival has been a result of the communal ties bonds that have been formed. These relations have shifted, or evolved, through the decades but the sense of "pride" and "community" have enabled the town to survive. Winter is a testament to not only its founding fathers and pioneering settlers, but also to those who have helped shaped it since the formative years until today. Without the communal ties bonds formed from various social organizations, community events, churches, families, schools, and businesses the community may have suffered a similar fate of many other small towns throughout not only the Chippewa Valley, including Lemington, Couderay, and Loretta; but Wisconsin in general including Progress, Springbrook, and Stangelville.

Many of the descendants of the yeoman farmers are still an important part of the community. Names provided by Thomas Noyes in his several "settler count" articles in the *Sawyer County Gazette* in the late 1910s and early 1920s are still prominent in the community today as they had been since the early part of the twentieth century – such as the Larsons,' whose "beautiful new home" was featured on the front page of the *Gazette* in 1918. Similarly are the Martins,' such as the late Caroline (Martin) Benson who remembered during the Depression the "fragrance of popping corn from Tucker's corner [that] attracted many a young man and his date."¹³⁴ Descendants of John LeBeouf, Winter's first settler, still occupy the original homestead on the northern end of Main Street. Grandchildren of the Winter's first mayor, Edward P. Arntz, also still remain in the area.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ "Larson Brothers' Beautiful New Home Northeast of Winter," *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), August 1, 1918, 1; Martin-Benson, "Remembering Winter," n.p.;

¹³⁵ Marple, *The Visitor Who Came to Stay: Legacy of the Hayward Area*, 54.

Pioneer families like these and many others have made their individual marks on the cutover frontier of the Winter area. These people and their descendants have adapted to Winter's environment and created different communal ties among each other and the community in general. These relations have helped them endure through the different challenges they have faced through the twentieth century, including the difficult farming, lack of industry, and remote setting. Their experiences and personalities have shaped the community into its present day state where hundreds of visitors and vacationers enjoy themselves every year, as the late John Martin declared in 2005, "It can still be said, it's nice to live in Winter. If it wasn't, the majority of property owners wouldn't spend their hard earned vacations with us."¹³⁶

Winter will undoubtedly endure for ages to come as well, despite the recent figures of the U.S. Census which indicate a small population decrease. The individuals remember the work and initial bonds that were formed by them and their ancestors, and the sacrifices they encountered, and will prevent the community's failure for generations to follow. It is a place where even a vacationer can be greeted by name at a grocery store; a place where a fellow citizen will stop to help you with a flat tire; and a place where friends meet.

* * *

The ghosts of the past will always remain. Listen closely and in your imagination you can probably hear the shouting of the lumbermen as they fell a tree, the chugging of the railroad, as it hauls railcars of logs to the mills. Listen for the cowbells and watch for the lights to dim as the milking machines turn on for the evening milking. Listen for the one-room school bells and the sound of the buggy or Model T delivering the mail. Stand by the Tuscobia Trail and imagine yourself flagging down the train for a flatcar ride to town for the July 4th Celebration. Close your eyes and think of all the pioneers who, on warm, clear summer nights, sang songs as they rode their hay wagons home from town after a street dance.

– Laura Hunkel, "Happy Centennial Winter"¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Martin, "Winter A True Happyland," n.p.

¹³⁷ Hunkel, "Happy Centennial, Winter!" n.p.

APPENDIX A

The full entry from the diary of an unknown author, explaining her mixed feelings about the possibility of moving to “Happy Land.”

May 15, 1919 – The land agent has been here. The result of his visit is that Al leaves here Sunday to go up into Wisconsin to look it over. A man will do most anything to become his own boss. Al has worked so long for others and under others that now when there seems to be an opportunity to get something of his own to work for, he will rush for it without really thinking. Altho[ugh] I tremble for the future if he makes up his mind to go. Still, I have encouraged him. Perhaps it will be the wisest thing we [have] ever done to get away from the city. But how are we going to go about it, with only \$200 in the bank? The Land Company requires \$250 as a first down payment. With that we receive our “contract” The balance is to be paid in yearly payments with 6 per cent interest on the principal, with ten years to pay. The Land is selling from \$20 to \$45 an acre.

I was good at figures in school, but this is beyond me how will we be able to meet those payments if we buy. I know very little of cut-over land but I don't imagine we will be able to raise a crop on such land the first year. Oh! Well, we haven't bought yet, maybe never shall. Why worry over figures which may never be ours? The agent did have a way about him. He stirred longings within me, which is not healthy for me to dwell too much upon. He made it all so easy. In no time we would have a home of our own surrounded with a big garden of vegetables, a cow or two which meant lots of milk for nothing for the boys. “Why, people! You don't need any money going out there. You can live right off the ground.”

What appeals to me the most is the “home of our own.” We have lived in this flat for nearly two years. The land lord lives down stairs. His wife is very “nervous.” Sonny (the author's oldest child) has to walk on his tip-toes across the floor. He never allowed to give himself up to any childish romps for fear he might disturb the “nervous” lady downstairs. My heart aches for him every time I must hush him down; it really seems like a prison more than a home. When Baby came, they raised the rent. I had to laugh.

But since the agent was here, I've been thinking that even a Dug-out would be better than this – we could at least be natural. I can smell the fragrance of the pines in my imagination. I picture myself running around the woods with Sonny, hunting wild flowers while the birds are singing overhead. Again I'm day-dreaming. Shall I wake up again to find only “reality?”

APPENDIX B

The following is the account of the “snow baby,” retold by Caroline (Martin) Benson in her essay, *Remembering Winter*.

In February of 1941 another event occurred which really put Winter on the map. Doctor Smith, on his way to Park Falls with a patient, Mrs. Harry Armstrong, who was expecting an imminent birth, skidded into a snow bank. Doc hailed a passing car and transferred his patient into it. When they reached the hospital, they found that the baby had already been born and dropped into the snow bank when they transferred the mother to the other car. Doctor Smith and Nurse Besaw returned hastily to the scene, and to their surprise found the baby wrapped in a blanket and then left to notify the Sheriff, convinced that there was foul play. By the time the Sheriff arrived, Doctor Smith and the nurse had in the meantime taken the baby to the hospital. The little one survived the unusual birth, and became known as the "Snowball Baby." The child was a boy and was named Ronald.¹³⁸

The *Sawyer County Gazette* provided full accounts of this event, and even provided an afterward describing baby to later be in fine condition, and was inquired by Ripley’s Believe It or Not after gaining national attention.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Benson, “Remembering Winter,” n.p.

¹³⁹ “He Asks of Baby, Believe It or Not,” *Sawyer County Gazette* (Winter, WI), February 20, 1941, 1.

APPENDIX C

The following was a poster advertisement for Winter's Centennial in 2005, a reminder that communal ties are important even in the twentieth century.¹⁴⁰

TOWN OF WINTER
1905 **100 Years** 2005
Happyland
Winter, Wisconsin
2005

CENTENNIAL
August 13th & 14th

- SATURDAY -

- Rendezvous - All Day - Hwy 70 (across from Winter Lumber)
 - Food & Beverages - 10 a.m. to ? - Doc Smith Park
 - Buggy Rides - 10 a.m. to ? - Doc Smith Park
- Historical Vignettes - Days of Railroad, Logging, Farming, Trapping, & Fur Trading - 10 a.m., 1 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. - Winter School
 - Quilt Show - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. - Winter School
 - Historical Display - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. - Winter School
- Historical Logging Display - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. - Doc Smith Park
 - Horsepull - 1 p.m. - Doc Smith Park
 - Sweet Adelines Singers - 3 p.m. - Winter School
- Costume Contest - (Cash Prizes Awarded) - 6:30 p.m. - Winter Fire Hall
 - Lenore Berg Band - 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. - Winter Fire Hall

- SUNDAY -

- Coffee Hour & Bake Sale - 9:30 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. (& after service)
- Ecumenical Church Service - 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. - Winter School
 - Historical Display - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 - Quilt Show - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 - Community Centennial Choir - 12:30 p.m. - Winter School
 - Flambeau Ramblers Barbershop Chorus - 1 p.m. - Winter School
 - 100 PRIZE CENTENNIAL DRAWING - following performance

**RAFFLE TICKETS • COMMEMORATIVE PLATES • T-SHIRTS
SOLD THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

¹⁴⁰ Image in possession of the author.

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Lea (Johansen) Geringer is a native to the Winter area and provides insight into the cutover period during Winter's formative years.

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Laura Hunkel, a native of the Winter area, provided in-depth details and examinations of community history through the Great Depression era until modern times.

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