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* Early Rib Lake

10912

Bonneville Tells of Old Times in Rib Lake

A visit with Alphonse Bonneville, who is probably the oldest citizen of Rib Lake in point of residence, prompted the editor of the Rib Lake Herald to write the following reminiscences of earlier days:

"Alphonse Bonneville, in point of years of actual residence, the oldest citizen of Rib Lake, has not been feeling very well of late. We called on him the other day to see how he is and that brought old memories back to him and he told us many things we never heard before.

Mr. Bonneville is 81 years old and has lived in Rib Lake 47 years, coming here in 1877, when Rib Lake was a part of Westboro and Rib Lake voters went to Westboro on election day to vote.

There were two trails through the woods that led to Rib Lake.

J. J. Kennedy was logging at Oge-ma and the Curtis brothers made him a proposition to come to Rib Lake and log and saw the logs into lumber. J. J. Kennedy and his brothers Angus and Will came with him. The first mill was built in 1877.

Mr. Bonneville's brother Peter and "Big Mac" McDonald built the first "go-devil" to haul the steam boiler in from Chelsea. It took them two days with a four-horse team to do it.

The first house J. J. Kennedy built here is the one which Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Korn's occupy at present. The first mill had a capacity of 50,000 feet. It was torn down for a larger one which had a capacity of 150,000 feet, but it cost \$1.00 per 1,000 more to cut lumber in this than it did in the first mill. This mill burned down and a smaller one was built in 1897, capacity of about 75,000, which was sold to the Rib Lake Lumber Company and when destroyed by fire some years ago, was replaced by the present one.

The first two years the lumber was hauled to Chelsea and piled in a yard just across the track from Bert Aitken's farm north of Chelsea. The third year, J. J. Kennedy cut and turned the road bed to Chelsea, the Wisconsin Central furnished the steel, J. J. Kennedy furnished the ties and laid the steel, and as soon as a mile of track was laid it was added to the Wisconsin Central. Rib Lake was connected with the main line with a railroad thing called a boxcar. The railroad company furnished an old boxcar for a passenger and conductor. The train was operated by...

the Wisconsin Central, the engineer and fireman by J. J. Kennedy and J. J. Kennedy also owned the locomotive and furnished the slabs used for its fuel.

The engine used to run a pay car on the Portage branch. It used slabs for fuel and spit firebrands all the way from a few inches to a foot long. Those were great old days when we could get a special train any old time without any guarantee. The passenger coach was an old one, with the seats replaced with wooden benches. However, it must be mentioned that this was not the first train service. The first few years the only train was the way-freight, which would come in and go out any old time.

J. J. Kennedy gave land and a carload of lumber to Fayette Shaw to come to Rib Lake to build a cannery here. He also gave a carload of lumber to build the Winchester hotel at Medford.

The lake was full of fish. You could throw in your hook and line ten minutes before breakfast and have all the fish you could eat for your meal. Some muskellonge weighed 35 pounds and of other fish there was no limit.

J. J. Kennedy built one of the finest horse tracks in this part of the state. He was a horseflesh fancier. Bill Kennedy, Angus Kennedy, Sam Hagen, Mr. Bonneville and others had race horses. This track he sold to A. C. McComb of Oshkosh who platted it into what is known as "McComb's Racing Park Addition to the Village of Rib Lake." Mr. Kennedy built the largest hotel in the county and for years it had all it

could house. There were about 125 rooms in it. Rib Lake had one of the biggest Fourth of July celebrations in the county in the summer of 1897. There were about 1,000 visitors here, which was a large crowd when one considers that the only means of transportation in those days was the rail and the horse.

At one time Mr. Kennedy was offered \$100,000 in cash to quit. The proposition was worth half a million and Mr. Kennedy decided to stay.

Mr. Bonneville was the first assessor after Rib Lake was set aside as a town and held the office three terms.

1877 ?
1887
RPR

1897 FILE
1914 FILE

COMMERCIAL HOTEL

10912

F R L T T
HISTORY - 1924
ALPHONSE
BONNEVILLE

ANNOTATIONS R. P. RUSSETT
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