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SE HISTORY - 3/5/1931

A Picture of the Village of Rib Lake As It Was Forty-five Years Ago

Taken from an Article in the
Star-News Files of 1886

Forty-five years ago this week Ed-
gar T. Wheelock, then editor of the
Star-News, made a trip to Rib Lake
and wrote up that village in a
lengthy article in his columns.

We reprint below his interesting
account of the status of the village
and its one and only industry at that
time.

45 Years Ago -

We do not claim to be the original
discoverer of the village of Rib Lake.
It has not been hid away for years
from mortal ken until the great
magician came and made the place
famous.

Rib Lake is a manufacturing vil-
lage situated on the shores of a beau-
tiful lake that gives the town and
village their name. The saw mill,
owned by J. J. Kennedy, consists of
a circular and band saw for cutting
logs; gang edger and trimmer, double
cutting shingle machine, and the
necessary small saws for cutting up
slabs and mill refuse. Convenience,
time and labor saving appear to have
been taken into consideration when
the mill was planned and built. The
power is furnished by steam from
four large boilers, the machinery be-
ing driven by a large powerful en-
gine.

This mill last year sawed 12,000,
000 feet of lumber, and was not
crowded beyond its capacity. For the
past three months the mill has been
undergoing through repairs, fitting

for the long run just inaugurated.
A start was made Wednesday last
and the little village "among the
whispering pines" is now full of the
sound of puffing steam and the buzz
of the hungry saw. Mr. Kennedy
has a planing mill. Attached
are commodious sheds for storing
the dressed lumber until shipped. A
switch track runs from the lumber
yard to the north side of the plan-
ing mill where lumber is unloaded
from the cars upon a platform and
then fed directly through the ma-
chines, coming out at the other side
of the mill ready for loading upon
cars standing on another side track.
This little mill is a model of con-
venience and neatness.

The village store, also owned by
J. J. Kennedy, is a two story build-
ing, 25x34 feet, and contains a large
stock of general merchandise. At
present Ben Hoey is the only clerk,
his late companion, Van Hecke, hav-
ing accepted a position in Stevens
Point. A large, well lighted office
in the body of the store is where
General Superintendent D. J. Mc-
Lennan holds forth in company with
the bookkeeper, Will Young. Mc-
Lennan does the buying for the store, at-
tends to the shipping of lumber, and
is the auditor of the concern. He
has his hands full.

The village of Rib-Lake contains
within its limits thirty-seven dwell-
ing houses, with a resident popula-
tion of about 170. This estimate does
not include what are commonly
known as transients, who are birds
of passage and are liable to flit to
other scenes at any time. The latter
class, or a majority of them, live at
the large hotel kept by Mr. and Mrs.
D. W. Bodle. Mr. Bodle says that
when the mill is running he has from
seventy-five to one hundred boarders.
Mr. and Mrs. Bodle are lifelong
hotel-keepers who strive to make
their house not a mere boarding
house but a comfortable stopping
place for the traveling public.

Every building in the village but
two is the property of J. J. Kennedy.
The two exceptions are the resi-
dences owned and occupied by Gen-
eral Superintendent D. J. McLennan
and General Manager Angus Ken-
nedy.

No spirituous or malt liquors,
wine, or other brain befuddling bev-
erages are sold within the village
limits, or nearer than Chelsea, seven
miles away.

There is a good district school in
the village, attended by from thirty
to forty pupils, and the religiously
inclined are privileged to attend ser-
vices every other week, conducted by
Rev. N. L. Sweet of Spenter, a Bap-
tist minister. Rev. B. Ungrodt, the
German Lutheran clergyman of Med-
ford, also holds services there occa-
sionally.

The logs for the saw mill are cut
in the surrounding forests, and
hauled to the lake by horse teams
over ice roads, the main road being
seven miles in length and of solid
ice. The loads put on the sleighs
would make a prairie farmer who
had never been in the lumber woods
think that the loaders were lunatics.
The logs are all scaled on the land-
ing and the loads run from three to
five thousand feet.

There are three camps on the main
road, all having a full crew of men
and teams under the supervision of
a competent foreman. There is an-
other camp south of an arm of the
lake that extends easterly and
bounds the village on the south.
There is still another camp at
Worthington's lake, about equidis-
tant from Chelsea and Rib Lake,
where about 1,000,000 feet have been
landed. The Rib Lake branch of
the Wisconsin Central railroad runs
by this lake, and in the summer the
logs will be loaded upon flat cars
and taken to the mill by rail. Mr.
Kennedy has now on the lake, near-
ly 10,000,000 feet of logs and is
banking from 150,000 to 200,000
daily.

A trip over the main road in the
company of Mr. Lewis of Fond du
Lac, J. J. Kennedy and his brother
the General Manager, was a genuine
surprise to the writer, who flatters
himself that he is no greenhorn in
the woods, if he is not very cute in
some things. The road is a perfect-
ly solid bed of ice and the heaviest
loads slip over its surface with very
little effort on the part of the team
except when ascending a grade. Teams
were met with loads towering
skyward like hay stacks, while the
horses plodded along contentedly
without sweating a hair. Nearly all
the teams are still in fair condition
and will come out in the spring with-
out showing very serious signs of
overwork. The teams on the seven
mile haul make two trips a day.
There are about eighty horse teams
hauling logs from the several camps,
only a part of them belonging to
Mr. Kennedy, the rest being owned
by the men who drive them and who
are working with their teams by the
day.

Mr. Kennedy's reason for going
so far from the mill for his logs this
winter is that he wishes to save his
timber near the lake for an open
winter, something that every lumber-
man dreads. There are millions of
feet of good pine stumpage almost
within sight of the lake. The timber
within reach of the Rib Lake mill
has nearly all been secured and will
keep the mill supplied with logs for
ten years or more. A portion of this
timber is owned by Curtis Bros. &
Co. of Clinton, Iowa, and Wausau,
and Mr. Kennedy is under contract
to cut and saw all their timber. Mr.
K. has considerable timber of his

own, and a portion of the logs he is
putting in this winter are from his
own stumpage. As an effort is made
to cut each section clean as they go,
taking the poor timber with the good,
the logs will not grade as high as
some logs put in for long drives, but
the timber in that section is good
and the logs average well, a large
percentage being of the very best
quality.

Rib Lake is rather a picturesque
body of water in the summer—just
at present it is a body of ice covered
with logs and is only picturesque
from a financial point of view—
shaped something like an L. At the
point where the two arms of the lake
join, with the shimmering lake on
the east and south, the dancing
wavelets coming within thirty feet
of the low windows, stands the pret-
ty cottage residence of J. J. Ken-
nedy, the man who owns the mill,
the lakes and the village, the same
identical red whiskered chap who
roused us in the morning with the
suggestion to look out on the lake
and see the logs coming. The cot-
tage was built last summer and is
unpretentious but homelike.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy are
hospitable, kindly people, who take
the visitor into their home circle and
make him feel that hospitality with
them is second nature. They have
one of the prettiest little homes in
Wisconsin, they have five bright,
beautiful children, and John would
be perfectly happy if those transi-
ents would not on just one more log.

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