

# Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

February 2022

## *Telling the Stories - Things We Know...*

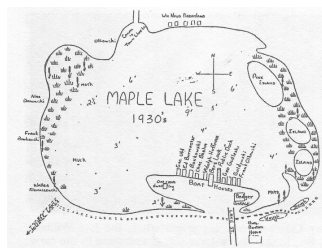
Frank Epler, a carpenter born in 1859, went to northern Wisconsin with a party of deer hunters in 1902 in search of a new home. Having heard of the Northwoods and lakes, when deer season was over the group went to North Crandon (Argonne now). As the Soo Line Train didn't stop at Gagen they had to get off at North Crandon and walk to Three Lakes. When they arrived at Stone Lake Bridge they talked to a farmer who told them there were twenty seven lakes in this chain, that there were a few summer cottages and a couple resorts, and that all the lakes were good fishing lakes. Frank saw the building potential, and moved his family here in 1904.

Frank's son Ed, born in 1893, remembered the move to Three Lakes and living in the American Hotel on Main Street for a time. The hotel, established about 1896 later became Hotel Three Lakes and then Lowey's. Eventually torn down in the late 1960's, it was replaced by the Best Western Alpine Motor Inn that then became The Oneida Village. All on the same corner.



Ed Epler grew up in Three Lakes and became renowned for his skills as an auto mechanic. The first Badger Garage, built by Epler and Ray Barker, was located on the sand flats of Maple Lake, created when the water level suddenly dropped eight feet. This was a result of the Maple to Townline canal dredged in 1904 to connect Maple Lake to the Chain. Ed kept a crew of four mechanics on seven days a week repairing tourist automobiles that made the grueling trip up Highway 26. With few parts on hand, Ed and his mechanics often created the necessary parts in the shop.

By the late 1930's roads were becoming a tolerable form of transportation around the maze of lakes. Water routes were no longer needed and it was decided that the canal connecting Maple Lake to Townline was no longer necessary. A dam was constructed at the Maple Lake end and by the mid 1940's the water level had risen to original levels. The buildings that had been constructed on the sand flats were razed and Ed Epler had already moved the Badger Garage up the hill and onto Superior Street.



Ed married Olga Johnson, daughter of Julius and Petrina. Julius Johnson's job as a boss with South Shore Railroad brought him and his family to Three Lakes where in 1890 they purchased three lots with a small house on one for \$150. One of the lots was sold for delinquent taxes of \$0.68. Over time the Johnson's added onto the house, raised their family and ultimately died there. One hundred years later the town sold the house to the newly formed Historical Society to become the home of the Three Lakes Museum.

## ... and How We Know It

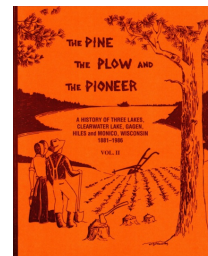
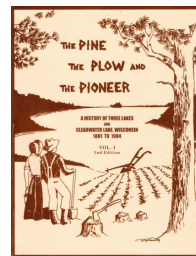
We're able to put all of the pieces of that story that began in 1859, together with images that support it, because family, friends, and community members took the time to write them down and share them.

In 1973 at 80 years of age, Ed Epler published his book, *Eighty Years in God's Country*. This was a compilation of Ed's recollections of life in Three Lakes. He expressed his appreciation to old friends who shared memories: George Campbell, Art Nelson, Raymond Neu, Dave Nelson, Walt Goldsworthy, the Johnson family, Fred Williams, William Neu Jr., the Step family, Lawrence Wheeler, and Vernon Dobbs. It is a wonderful easy to read book that brings early Three Lakes to life.

Ten years later in 1983 the newly formed Three Lakes Centennial Museum Committee accepted the challenge to compile a local history book telling more stories of the people that settled here. They reminded people that they were all a part of the local history, a community with a legacy that needed to be preserved before it was lost. The work on this book project was in addition to the establishment of a physical space to collect and display the local artifacts of the past, the Three Lakes Museum. Community engagement was essential to publish this book of stories called *The Pine the Plow and the Pioneer*.



A brochure was mailed out to the 800 residents of the Three Lakes area and included instructions and an example of how to complete the form. The response was immediate and the project was so successful that a second volume was published the following year.



"...over the years, we have met many wonderful people. I remember Loewy's Restaurant with good home cooked meals, no fast foods there. We'd get a nice warm bath at the Chalet Hotel for 50 cents a person. We'd shop at Dobb's Red Owl store and the groceries would be carried out by the Stoehr boys. Our car was serviced at Epler's Badger Garage. Hardware was bought at Richard Dobb's store. Ice cream cones for a nickel at the drugstore. Our mail was delivered by boat right to the pier, rain or shine by Emil Zembinski, a service now a thing of the past. The old railroad depot where we would meet the train and our commuting husbands on weekends. All, only memories now but never to be forgotten."

Tina Karlsson in *The Pine The Plow and The Pioneer* reminiscing about when in 1936, she and her husband Ernst were introduced to the Northwoods

It has been 40 years since local history was formally gathered, published and made available to everyone. Since then the museum has collected, archived and displayed countless artifacts, documents and images. A lot has happened. A lot has changed. But one thing remains. Three Lakes is a community with history and that history is you, whether your family has been here 100 years or one. View our history as a jigsaw puzzle of a thousand pieces and you will see that what you know and share helps to complete that puzzle.

At this time, the Demmer Library, the Three Lakes Historical Society, and the Three Lakes Genealogy Society are all collaborating to collect your stories. The great thing is, this time you don't have to pound them out on an old typewriter. Today's technology can have you and your family or friends sitting around a table reminiscing and recording on your phone. Or you could pound it out on your laptop. Any way you do it, please do it. It's important for the generations to come that what happens today is not lost.



## ***Who to Contact and How to Do It***