

# Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

April 2025

## *The Black Forest* 1765 Superior Street

Over the years the Black Forest Pub & Grille has served as a gathering place for Three Lakes visitors and locals alike to share a drink or enjoy a meal, but this iconic Three Lakes landmark had much simpler beginnings.

The earliest accounts of this location tell us that in 1922 it was a Western Union and telephone exchange run out of the home of William and Clara Brandner. A dentist, listed on the Oneida County mail directory of 1930, also shared the space.

It was an unrelated event unfolding during this same time period that would set up what happened next at the the little house at 1765 Superior. Thunder Lake and the vast marshlands to the west of town had lain undisturbed for centuries until farmers began to harvest hay. All went well until the early 1920's when land speculators moved in with dredges and plows digging vast drainage ditches and destroying forever the true potential of the marsh.

One dark night, a disgruntled individual detonated dynamite on the north shore of the lake near one of the existing ditches. The damage from the blast dropped the lake level several feet, and for several years the lake was left like this. Gus Anders, who owned the nearby Sky Lodge, hired the Basch brothers, Orville, Gil and Clyde, to construct a log dam to bring the water level back to its original point. Dam shenanigans in the marsh continued through the following decades. It was this activity that introduced the Basch brothers to Three Lakes.

In 1934, partners Anders and Orville Basch purchased the property 1765 Superior Street and became the original proprietors of the Black Forest. Anders worked in Chicago as a stock trader. Basch worked in Three Lakes. In developing the new business Orville sought the help of local architect and former Major League Baseball player Fred "Cy" Williams to help him transform the building into a tavern. Orville commissioned Cy to model the tavern after the beer gardens of Germany's Black Forest and the attractive Old Heidelberg Inn featured at Chicago's 1933 World's Fair.





Clyde Basch, working for Anders and his brother, began bartending at the Black Forest in 1934.

In September of 1938, Anders and Orville Basch purchased the Hotel Badger on Superior Street next to the hardware store. This hotel, built in 1920 by Cy Williams, would again be remodeled by Cy to Orville's design standards to become The Chalet. Clyde Basch, seen in the photo on the right on steps of The Chalet, would run it.



True to the original design of 1934, a large addition was added to the Black Forest as a dance floor in 1939 and restaurant features were added in 1941. The bowling alley in back was built in 1948. While ownership has changed over the years, the distinct features of the Black Forest have retained their classic look from the early days of the tavern. The beamed cathedral ceilings in the dining room, the original bar from 1934, and the distinct exterior design keep alive the original vision and character of the building envisioned by Orville Basch.



A new partnership agreement in 1968 brought local entertainment and a stage to the Black Forest. Henry Wagner (b 1934), who had formed the Hank Wagner Polka Band at age 19 and learned to play over 20 instruments became known professionally as Skip Wagner. He joined Bill and Helen Swain, Roger Debban and Willie Hobson to purchase and operate the business where Skip showcased his musical, comedic and artistic abilities.



Over the years owners and elements of the original tavern have changed, such as the addition of a bowling alley which remained until the 1990's when a roof cave-in caused the transition of this space into a game room. But the exterior of the building still compliments the interior which remains true to its origins in the 1930's and invokes as many feelings as the food and drinks served inside. The Black Forest is an irreplaceable icon as a snapshot of Three Lakes history.

