

Who's Who In Wisconsin Rapids

The Who's Who column will be run each Saturday in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune. It will include a brief sketch of the life of citizens who have helped make history for Wisconsin Rapids.

Edward Wheelan



EDWARD WHEELAN

Edward Wheelan, one of the pioneer residents of this city, was born in Rathding, Wicklow County, Ireland on February 20, 1839. He is a son of Edward Wheelan Sr., and Bridget (Cody) Wheelan. His mother died in Ireland when he was young. Mr. Wheelan is one of a family of ten children, six daughters and four sons.

Came From Ireland

In the year 1848, Edward Wheelan Sr., left Ireland with his children and sailed for America in a small vessel. The fireman on the vessel was a negro, and greatly fascinated, as well as entertained both father and children who had never seen a colored man. They arrived safely in New York, coming directly from that city to Milwaukee where they resided for about one year. From Milwaukee, the family moved to Fond du Lac where young Edward, then ten years old, was "bound out" to a man by the name of William Murray, to learn the tailor trade. Mr. Murray lived on a farm near Fond du Lac, and had a tailor shop in the town where he and Edward went every morning to work, returning home in the evening.

The lure of the circus proved a disaster to him in the Murray home. A circus being billed to appear in Fond du Lac, Edward decided to remain in town to see the elephants and the performers in their tinselled glory. On his return to the farm late at night, he was given a sound thrashing by his employer. Early next morning he arose and ran away for parts unknown. His wardrobe consisted of one suit of clothes and a pair of trousers. He threw the trousers out of the window, and picking them up from the ground started forth in quest of work. His entire fortune consisted of fifty cents, and after he had walked four miles, he came to a tavern and being hungry he decided to go in and buy his breakfast for which he paid twenty-five cents. Travelling three miles farther he came to the Seven Mile Creek where there was a tavern and a store. He spent the balance of his money in the store for a bag of peanuts.

Got Farm Job

While sitting and eating the nuts, a farmer drove up who told him where he could find a job as a harvest hand at seven dollars a month. When he had finished eating the nuts, he started out to find the farm to which he had been directed. The owner, E. E. Crowe was an old sailor, and the first days stay was spent by Mr. Wheelan in listening to his new employer's sea yarns. Mr. Wheelan remained with Mr. Crowe over four years working on the farm in the summer time and attending the rural school in the winter time. He was paid for his services in board and clothing, and when he left Mr. Crowe gave him one hundred dollars, it being the most money he had ever owned.

After leaving the Crowe farm he came to Mosinee in the year 1858, where he worked in the woods near the village, cutting timber which was sent to the shanty in Mosinee here it as made into shaved shingles by him, and sent to the market for sale. While working in the woods and felling trees his partner Pat McCormick was cutting down a tree. Mr. Wheelan had gone a short distance and when he returned was struck down by one of the limbs of the falling tree, and was badly bruised. Mr. McCormick, believing he was killed, started for the shanty in search for help but Mr. Wheelan

called him back, and, after resting for a time walked to the shanty, a distance of two miles. He went to work again the next day.

Made Trip Down River

The following spring, he went down the river on a raft of lumber and on his return from the trip, came to Grand Rapids which has been his home ever since. He runs the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers as raftsmen and a pilot for several years, and was well acquainted with all the lumberjacks of the early days. In the year 1862, while making one of his trips, the water in the Wisconsin river got low and the runners were incompetent and unable to manage the rafts. It took them forty days to make the trip from here to Portage, which usually took from four to five days. When the trip was completed, the "boss" cut the wages of the men, but Mr. Wheelan demanded full pay for both himself and the tailman, as they were both competent river men and could have made the trip on schedule time, had they not been handicapped by other rafts.

In those days, there was not a sufficient number of conveyances to bring the lumberjacks from New Lisbon to Grand Rapids, on their return from the trips down river, and many were obliged to walk the distance which is about forty miles.

Narrowly Avoid Death

In the year 1862, when returning from one of his trips with his partner, Russ Roberts, they saw some Indians smoking venison on the river bank and stepped ashore to buy some of it, and as it smelled good they thought they would try some of it. While eating, they threw the bones on the ground which was owned by Alex Taylor, a well known character, who was a very aggressive man. One of the bones may have struck one of the Taylor children as Alex drew his gun and leveled it at Mr. Wheelan, but the shot fortunately just missed him. About the year 1860, Alex Taylor was shot by a Frenchman, who was caught and imprisoned. He broke jail, however, and was never recaptured.

When the Civil War broke out Mr. Wheelan did not join the ranks but he helped Captain John Compton muster in Co. G of the 18th regiment of Wisconsin Infantry. Capt. Compton was killed April 5, 1862 in the battle of Shiloh. He was the father of Mrs. Ivah Babcock and Mrs. Ella Schultz, who are both living in this city.

Was Former Sheriff

In the year 1880, although a Democrat, the Greenback party nominated him for sheriff, electing him by a good majority. After the expiration of his term as sheriff, Mr. Wheelan engaged in the lumber business which he conducted for ten years, following which he bought and scaled logs for the Wilbur Lumber Co., Milwaukee. Two of the members of the firm were former residents of Wood County, the late James Cameron who lived in Vesper and the late Frank Cameron who resided in this city for several years. In the year 1907, Mr. Wheelan retired from business life.

On January 6, 1870, Edward Wheelan was united in marriage to Mary Wright, My Rev. Cameron, pastor of the Congregational church. Five children were born to them, four sons and one daughter, three of whom are still living, W. E. Wheelan, an attorney, Frank Wheelan, a business man, and Edmond Wheelan, an attorney who is the only married one, and who lives at Sand Point, Idaho. Mrs. Wheelan died at her home in this city April 14, 1919. The daughter, Nettie, married Saul Sutliff of Rhinelander. She passed away at her home in that city February 20 1910. His son Harry died at Vancouver, B. C. February 4, 1918.

Mr. Wheelan met with an accident about six weeks ago when he fell on the icy sidewalk. It temporarily disabled him, but he is recovering and will soon be about again. He is a strong believer in fore ordination as he says he has proven it by so many narrow escapes from death. He is a man of genial disposition, always has a store of good stories to relate, and with his ready Irish wit is a very interesting entertainer.

WANT STATE GRAIN SHOW AT GREEN BAY

Green Bay, Wis., Feb. 25.—The 1922 state grain show will probably be held in Green Bay, according to J. N. Kavanaugh, county agricultural agent. He said that this city was the most favored for the show, although Oshkosh and Fond du Lac were making a hot race to land the grain show.

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